COMMUNITY RADIO IN BOLIVIA
THE MINERS' RADIO STATIONS

Edited by
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To Luis Ramiro Beltran

Table of Contents

Preface i

John Downing

Acknowledgments vi

Introduction 1

Alan O'Connor

Chapter 1 19

Miners' Radio of Bolivia: A Historic Experience of Self-Managed Communication

Fernando Lozada and Gridvia Kúncar C.

Chapter 2 45

Bolivian Miners' Radio: Interview with Jorge Mancilla Romero

Héctor Schmucler and Orlando Encinas

Chapter 3 67

Miners' Radio 1963–1983

Lupe Cajías

Chapter 4 83
The Political Role of Miners' Radio
Alfonso Gumucio Dagron

Chapter 5 97
Radio Nacional in 1985
Fernando Lozada Saldías

Chapter 6 105
Chronicle of a Miners' Radio Station: Sumac Orcko in Potosí
Dulfredo Retamoso L.

Chapter 7 113
Radio Matilde: A Very Short Life
Luisa Limachi

Chapter 8 121
Bolivia: Miners' Radio Is Dying
Raquel Salinas

Open Conclusion 129
Alfonso Gumucio Dagron

Bibliography 133

Index 139

Preface

The study of radio has by and large been relegated to an also-ran, pushed aside, seemingly, by television, cinema, computers, satellites, and other whiz-bangs. So the consideration of one of the most historically dynamic and encouraging chapters in the global history of media risks falling off the map. Among those North American media historians and analysts who have struggled to put radio back on the research agenda, Michele Hilmes at the University of Wisconsin is deservedly at the top of the tree. Yet even the *Radio Reader* she recently co-edited (2002), excellent as its contributions are, rarely gets out of the USA, and certainly never mentions the Bolivian miners' radio stations.

Well why should it? Bolivia, landlocked since 1884, poorer than virtually any other nation in the Americas, having a very high proportion of its population of Quechua, Aymara, or mixed Indigenous–European descent, tormented by a seemingly endless series of coups d'état until relatively recently...why in the Western/Northern imaginary should anything of significance emerge from there? Aside from coca cultivation, aside from a moribund tin-mining industry, what is there? And radio...*really* who cares? What do "they" have to teach "us"?

However in a hemispheric perspective—still more in a global one—radio continues to up-end all other mass media. Cheap, transportable, functioning independently of literacy, it enjoys tremendous flexibility and accessibility. No need for movie theatres, no need for bulky TV sets, no need for piped electricity, no need for anyone to pay for newspapers and magazines (assuming they can even read). Talk, drama, music, news, personal messages, the hook-up with

phones where there are phones—all make radio the medium of choice for the world's majority.

Furthermore, within the modern history of social and political movements, alternative and underground radio stations have played an enormously significant role. In the 1920s and 1930s, as the movement against British rule in India grew in momentum, tiny unofficial radio stations were part of the struggle. In Algeria in the 1950s, as Arabs and Berbers battled the long French occupation of the country, the rebels' radio fulfilled vital roles for the movement. In El Salvador in the 1980s, as a farmers' land rights movement faced a cruel US-backed military dictatorship, Radio Venceremos (Victory Will Be Ours Radio) linked guerrilla groups fighting against the regime.

These are examples of tense and dramatic moments in the history of alternative radio, but there are many instances of alternative radio use in more peaceful situations. The flood of small independent radio stations in Italy in the mid- to late 1970s and in France from the late 1970s through the early 1980s, the micro-radio stations in Tokyo in the early 1980s, and the low-power FM movement in the USA in the 1990s are only a few examples. Alfonso Gumucio Dagron offers a sheaf of examples in his *Making Waves* book on development media projects in the global South.

In turn, these instances are part of something even bigger still, a historically and geographically extensive movement of alternative media of many kinds, expressed in a technological cornucopia from graffiti, dance, street theatre, murals, and performance art through video and the Internet. From the fliers of the Protestant Reformation to the pamphlets of the English Civil War and the American and French revolutions, from the anti-slavery books and tracts written by African Americans and white Americans, from the media of the global labor movement past and present, from feminist media, from ecological media, we can cull endless examples of Our Media—as an international research network active

since 2001 calls itself and its subject matter (see OURMedia/NUESTROSMedios, http://www.ourmedianet.org and http://www.nuestrosmedios.org).

The term "Our Media" signals both an opposition and a claim of ownership: opposition to the giant corporate media that generally play their owners' tunes, and a sense that alternative media—small, fragile, and problematic as they may sometimes be—nonetheless show some basic responsiveness to the currents of opinion and the fundamental experiences of the more or less excluded majority of humans. They represent an alternative public forum, media spaces in which we can breathe and develop our own strengths, conduct argument, wrestle with dilemmas, and work to our own urgent agendas rather than the priorities of state, capital, and religious institutions.

It is within this cultural and political framework that the dynamic and inspiriting experiences of the independent Bolivian radio stations need to be understood. This book offers us a precious archive of those experiences, highlighting what extraordinary achievements can be made in often harsh and difficult circumstances. It underscores also just how much the global North has to learn from the global South, whether it realizes it or not. It is symptomatic that such an important archive of information for the global movement against injustice and exploitation should be virtually unknown outside Latin American media activist circles, and Alan O'Connor's dedication to getting this story onto the shelves and into a more secure and accessible place in history deserves all our gratitude.

These stations are for now almost gone. For some, that only bleakly signals their failure. For the more astute and less easily intimidated observer, that merely signals that the fight for justice has many chapters, and that the task for researchers who want to put their skills at the service of that fight is to study these experiences, capture their joys and excitement, grasp their problems and the hazards they faced—internal as well as external—and to use that reflection to contribute to developing the fight in new ways. As Internet radio gradually begins

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to become more possible, as the planetary imbalance of deployed resources and practical opportunities continues to disfavor the majority, and as mainstream media largely mute or "reinterpret" these realities, the radio story is a very long way indeed from being over. Read on for ideas and experience!

John Downing

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Introduction

Alan O'Connor

The Bolivian miners' radio stations are little known and less understood. They get scarcely a mention in the standard histories of Bolivia—usually when the workers demand their return in the course of one of Bolivia's numerous military coups—and a page or two in Bolivia's most famous working class *testimonio*. They came to the attention of communication specialists in the early 1980s as part of debates—falling at the time under the rubric "the New World Information and Communication Order"—about fairness in global communication. Perhaps these tiny self-organized radio stations high in the mountains in the Bolivian mining camps were a genuine alternative to news agencies run by huge media corporations in New York, Paris and London. Some communication specialists thought it unlikely.

As the military dictatorships that had governed Latin American for most of the 1970s began to wind down, Bolivian miners' radio entered another set of debates. The issue here was the complicity of most of the continent's media with—or at least its failure to speak out against—the military governments. Some national newspapers were encouraged and supported by the CIA and the United States government, but this could not explain the wholesale silence of newspapers and radio and television stations about human rights abuses. In thinking about issues of democracy and the media there again came up the example of trade-union radio stations in Bolivia that apparently had an absolutely heroic record in refusing to be silenced by even the most right-wing and ruthless military coups. What made these radio stations such paragons of unyielding democracy in media?

Bolivian miners' radio belongs to a historical world that Antonio Gramsci would have found thoroughly recognizable. The observations of this Italian socialist on the role of intellectuals in working class struggles are entirely relevant to the Bolivian radio stations. This is the Gramsci not of postmodern theories of identity but instead of a rather old-fashioned politics of alliances between different class fractions—especially between the mining camps and the countryside, between workers and campesinos. At the personal level, Gramsci and the miners believed in discipline, education, and order. The miners' interest in industry and technology—an interest Gramsci shared—aimed to increase productivity in the mines and was in part responsible for the miners' feverish competition in the 1950s over which union local had the best radio transmitter and the largest record library.

Yet in the spirals and tiger leaps of historical time, the example of the Bolivian miners lights up the imagination of a generation fifty years later. For it is undeniable that the miners' struggle in the 1950s stood against the restructuring imposed on the industry by the International Monetary Fund and other institutions of what today is called global capitalism. The so-called "black bloc" of anti-globalization protesters—demonized by mainstream media now, half a century on—seem positively polite and fun-loving when measured against the Bolivian miners with their history of armed resistance and strikes. The organizers of and participants in the electronic Independent Media Centre will have little difficulty recognizing the enthusiasm and passion of the Bolivian miners for their hand-built radio transmitters, high in the Bolivian mountains. It would indeed seem to be another version of the same struggle.

The New World Information and Communication Order

Bolivian miners' radio stations existed for thirty years before they attracted the attention of communication researchers in the early 1980s. The stations' international profile increased in part due to the presence in Mexico of social activists fleeing the particularly brutal dictatorship of General García Meza:

the Bolivian leader explicitly modeled his regime on that of General Pinochet in Chile. One of the first goals during his coup was to capture and completely control all the means of communication—progressive radio stations and the radical weekly newspaper *Aquí* being at the top of the list. It is not surprising that the Bolivians who took refuge in Mexico City had important testimony about this, testimony that appeared in the journal *Comunicación y Cultura* in 1982.

This interest intersected with contemporary debates about global communication, debates under the rubric of the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). These discussions had been initiated mainly by Latin American researchers and intellectuals and took place within the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other international organizations from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s. The issues were framed within Latin American theories of economic dependency, which put the blame for underdevelopment on relations of unequal exchange between North and South (or centre and periphery), rather than on any characteristics of the "underdeveloped" countries themselves. As part of these debates, the issue was raised about the power of a handful of international news agencies in New York, Paris, and London to shape perceptions about underdeveloped countries. By carrying a brief news item based on unreliable sources (about a possible coup, for example), a metropolitan newspaper could cause potential investors to change their minds and invest their capital elsewhere.

The debates took a more radical turn as a whole series of other issues were raised. Why do the international news agencies pay such little attention to the Third World and its perspectives and issues? Surely there is more happening in underdeveloped countries than earthquakes, famines, and military coups? What are the prospects for underdeveloped countries to communicate directly among themselves without passing through media gatekeepers in the capitals of the global communication industries? Hollywood movies have always been an unofficial advocate of the American way of life throughout the world. Why are

the cinema screens and television sets of the world flooded with content made in California, and what effects does this have on the imagination of citizens of the poor countries? Why does the developed world have the lion's share of the radio spectrum (much of it used by the military) and how can the underdeveloped world ever have access to satellites and mainframe computers?

The inequalities became even more humiliating when it was realized in the 1970s that the United States had the ability to gather and analyze data from surveillance satellites on Third World crops and mineral deposits (information useful for speculation on commodities markets) when most underdeveloped countries lacked the capacity to analyze this data themselves. At the United Nations itself, the United States government was completely isolated on the issue of broadcasting commercial television signals into other nations without their permission.

All of these debates within UNESCO came crashing to a halt in 1984 when the United States simply withdrew its membership (and, with it, about 25 per cent of the organization's funding), thus confirming the fundamental point about the imbalance of power and the developed world's refusal to negotiate. Probably few people at the time realized that the stakes were much higher than the interests of international news agencies and foreign sales of Hollywood movies. What was at stake was the principle of non-interference with the information technology that would coordinate the so-called global economy. Transborder data flows allow a corporation in Michigan to continually monitor production at its Mexican plant and allow traders in London to speculate on the currencies of Third World countries and commodity futures of products such as coffee, rice, bananas, tin, and zinc.

Democratic Media

At a meeting in Yugoslavia in 1977 as part of the NWICO discussions, it was asked what democracy in communication actually means. The somewhat

benign language of the international organization spoke about access, participation, and self-management.

- Access simply means the ability of the public to choose varied and relevant programs and to have some means of feedback to influence production organizations (for example, letters to the editors or phone-in radio shows).
- Participation involves a higher degree of public involvement, including involvement in the production process and in the management of communication systems (some community radio stations in Europe and the United States have this).
- The highest level of democracy is self-management, in which the public exercises the power of decision-making in communication enterprises and is also involved in formulating communication policies and plans.

There would seem to be very few examples of self-managed communication systems in the world. However, the UNESCO language could be interpreted in different ways. Thus, the United States could argue that self-management already exists in its media system because policy is made by the public through elected politicians and by shareholders of media corporations.

This was the context in which Bolivian communicators began to tell other communication researchers and activists about an independent, self-funded network of radio stations that had existed for decades. The pioneering scholarly treatment by Lozada and Kúncar (1983) (Chapter 1 of this book) gives a historical overview of Bolivian miners' radio and then attempts to relate this history to the UNESCO diplomats' relatively bland language about democratic media. Thus, Lozada and Kúncar argue that self-financed and socially owned miners' radio fit the highest definition of participation. Evidence that decisions are taken by union leaders, in committees and general assemblies would seem to make a strong case for self-management. Although not everyone speaks on the radio stations, there is

participation and access, which are different in "normal" times and times of emergency. Recordings of broadcasts made during periods of military coups and presented by Alfonso Gumucio (see Chapter 4) seem to show quite widespread participation in which ordinary workers, housewives, and students speak in front of the microphone. Lozada and Kúncar even adopt—but in a poetic way—the notion of human *dialogue* from the Latin American communication theorist Antonio Pasquali. In the emergency broadcasts of the miners' radio stations more is being transmitted than information. It is a genuine dialogue of a people with itself.

Certainly Lozada and Kúncar have to acknowledge the rudimentary organization and programming of most of the miners' stations. These are political radio stations, intended as part of an organized workers' movement rather than as deliberate experiments in alternative media. Thus the often evasive language of the NWICO debates is less useful as an analytic frame for these stations than are the reflections of Gramsci on culture and intellectuals, and Lozada and Kúncar's focus on the stations' actual strengths and sometime shortcomings.

The Testimony of an Organic Intellectual

The fascinating interview given by Jorge Mancilla (Chapter 2) contains all the elements of what has now become the standard history of Bolivian miners' radio. Remember that Mancilla was interviewed in Mexico City, where he lived in exile following the 1980 coup d'état of García Meza. It is therefore not surprising that the framework of the interview is the role of democratic media against Latin American dictatorships. Indeed, the journalistic hook introducing the interview in 1982 is the news that the military have agreed to plans to reopen the radio stations.

The discourse throughout is one of revolutionary nationalism. In this framework, the Bolivian nation is not so much a creation of the nineteenth-century wars of independence as it is a reaction against the disastrous Chaco War in the 1930s and an expression of popular will in the 1952 revolution. This is

understood as a kind of cultural revolution expressing itself in stories and songs and in the miners' radio stations. (Difficult issues of how indigenous peoples might be involved in this national project would come to prominence in later decades.) The stations were a cultural expression from below—not organized from La Paz by the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), nor by the Trade Union Congress of Bolivia (COB). Indeed, Mancilla is at pains to point out that these national organizations showed little understanding of the potential of radio broadcasting—his criticism of Trotskyists' insistence on printed materials is particularly harsh.

There is almost a teleological character about Mancilla's understanding of the national revolutionary project. This project is carried above all by the organized workers, and especially the miners. Campesinos do not play much of a role in his story. The project is thwarted not only by numerous military coups but also by such groups as reactionary teachers and the Catholic Church in its conservative mode. The main enemy is what we would now call global capitalism, represented by transnational corporations and the United States through such organizations as the International Monetary Fund. The national revolution is represented politically by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR), but to Mancilla's way of thinking, this party has clearly betrayed it. At the end of the interview he expresses his support for a coalition of leftist parties, the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP), a position also taken by the radical weekly paper *Aquí* at that time. The UDP would, however, prove ineffectual when it finally attained power after the dictatorship ended.

All of the main elements of the history of Bolivian miners' radio are present here: their origin, which is linked to the 1952 revolution, their rapid but haphazard growth and programming, the local character of the radio stations, the challenge posed by the arrival of Radio Pío XII (though it is the only station to be the subject of a historical monograph, many details of its origin and finance remain murky), and the conversion of Pío XII to the workers' cause in the 1960s.

Mancilla also validates the commonly made distinction between the haphazard nature of radio operations in normal times and the cohesiveness the stations exhibited during times of emergency.

Mancilla painstakingly lists the many times the radio stations were closed down by the military. Comparisons with other examples of alternative media—European free radio in the 1970s and community media since the 1980s—should keep this in mind. Moreover, these miners' stations operated without external funding, in situations of desperate poverty.

Radio and the Workers' Movement

In contrast with the left-nationalist discourse of Jorge Mancilla and idea of a cultural project of the national revolution, the interpretation of radical journalist Lupe Cajías links miners' radio closely to the workers' organizations. Of the documents in this collection, the paper by Cajías is both one of the most fascinating and probably the most difficult to read. It is based on the personal archives of the anarchist and theatre activist Líber Forti and uses documents of the union movement. The unions and workers' parties existed before 1952, and after the revolution they came to explicitly reject the politics of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR). The perspective on miners' radio here is similar to that in Guillermo Lora's history of the Bolivian labour movement:

> On October 1964 delegations of miners gathered in Oruro to attend the funeral of the students killed in the street-fighting against the Paz Government and the army on the 27th. Catavi and Siglo XX were represented by small groups, and the majority of the demonstrators from the mines were students from Llallagua's militant secondary school, the "Primero de Mayo." After the funeral there were new clashes, and the miners' radio stations of San José and Machacamarca, Huanuni and Siglo XX redoubled their attacks on the government, vehemently denouncing the shooting of workers in Oruro. These broadcasts increased the feelings of tension in the working class. That afternoon the unions held small assemblies in Catavi and Siglo XX and it was decided to march on Oruro, perhaps to fight a decisive battle against the armed forces which were in control of the city (Lora 1977, 330).

The central matter here is not something like "community radio" but an organized workers' movement and armed repression from the government. Certainly there are human rights abuses: workers are killed and tortured by the army. But there is also a more complex history of a workers' movement that included anarchists, Trotskyists, and communists as well as workers who supported the ruling MNR. In spite of all the calls for an end to sectarianism, these political differences were important and were fought out within the unions and at national conferences of the FSTMB and the COB.

Lupe Cajías (Chapter 3) locates the boom in miners' radio between 1963 and 1983 and closely links their success to the periods of strength of the union movement. The chapter describes three cultural conferences of the miners' Federated Union (FSTMB). The first took place in 1963 and produced the famous Resolution No. 16, which sets out a cultural and educational program for the miners and their families. This extraordinary document starts with the need for literacy education, proposes a national network of miners' radio linked to the FSTMB, and goes on to propose everything from workers' libraries, musical and folklore groups and experimental theatre troupes to printing workshops and schools of graphic arts. Clearly the radio stations are just one part of a larger cultural project. There were later proposals about puppetry, audiovisuals, Super 8 film-making by the miners, and technical training in radio. These ideas were often accompanied by passionate speeches about the spiritual life of the workers. At the third cultural conference in 1983, Víctor López initiated the discussion with these words: "Our union movement constitutes in all the camps, and for all men, women, and children, the possibility to develop a person more in solidarity, more human, and more free—that is, apart from alienation, the society of consumption, ignorance, crime, and the brutalization of man by work." This was a movement that struggled not only for bread but also for the human spirit. The radio stations engaged in both struggles.

Profiles of Radio Stations

In selecting texts on the miners' radio stations it has been important to remember that they are mainly local institutions, and accordingly there are variations in their different contexts. Though the first studies described the paradigm of small miners' radio stations founded in the period around the popular revolution of 1952—stations whose rudimentary programming improved in the 1960s with competition from the Catholic station Radio Pío XII and played a key role in resistance to various right-wing military coups—there are important differences. The apparent over-supply of radio stations in some mining districts makes more sense when one realizes that the mining camps did not necessarily share the same politics. Unlike the important mine of Siglo XX, which supported left-socialist politics, mining centres such as Viloco and Colquiri were ordinarily not particularly militant (Dunkerley 1984, 123). The internal politics of the mining camps could be intense, and the stations were not always insulated from this.

Among the most important miners' stations is Radio Nacional in Huanuni, which started broadcasting in 1959. The station is unusual in that it was intended not only to serve the local district but also to be powerful enough to reach the other mining centres. For this reason it has been able to operate during periods of political emergency as a "pilot" station for the network of miners' radio stations. Radio Nacional has a larger staff than the other smaller stations. The station operates to strongly defend the union movement, though it seems to have been funded by local workers and not by the miners' national Federated Union (FSTMB) in La Paz. Radio Nacional has shared the fate of other miners' stations and has been shut down and even destroyed by military coups. The report on the station in 1985 by Fernando Lozada (Chapter 5) is especially valuable because it includes a study of the actual contents of the programming. Again Lozada struggles with the UNESCO typology and concludes that though participation and

self-management are formally lacking, the radio station is nonetheless committed to the defense of the way of life of its listeners.[1]

Radio Sumac Orcko, operating from the city of Potosí rather than from an isolated mining camp, had to compete directly with local commercial radio stations.[2] The chronicle of Radio Sumac Orcko by Dulfredo Retamoso (Chapter 6)—in addition to simply contributing an urban perspective—describes, in eloquent language not easily captured in translation, a team of sophisticated journalists who staffed the station. These were clearly not unlettered miners or teachers with only a rudimentary education. (One is again reminded of Gramsci's notes on the role of intellectuals in the workers' struggles.) The main news show was the important program, and by this account its editorial used continual irony and sarcasm to make its point. As for other programs, Retamoso admits to compromises made because of commercial competition.

The last text included on an individual station is Luisa Limachi's account of Radio Matilde (Chapter 7), which is unusual in that it was founded in the 1980s and on the initiative of the FSTMB rather than the local workers. This station is also a case study in the sometimes-tense relations between the miners' national office in La Paz and different union locals. The fact that the radio stations were mostly local initiatives would make it difficult for the national office to act in the stations' crisis of the late 1980s.

Radio During "Normal" Times

It is understandable that much writing on miners' radio should emphasize its role in times of emergencies, as compellingly illustrated by the transcripts presented by Gumucio in Chapter 4. His commentary clearly explains how the

[1] A more recent study of Radio Nacional (Huesca 1995) describes a program broadcast live from different neighbourhoods of Huanuni with the participation of women listeners.

[2] Even in remote mining camps, however, other radio stations could usually be heard, especially on shortwave. Miners were reluctant to buy radio receivers lacking this band, and many of the miners' stations broadcast on AM and shortwave simultaneously.

stations linked together to broadcast during extraordinary times. Less is known about the daily operation and programming of miners' radio during normal times, despite valuable testimony found on this in some of the interviews included here. And so the following section of this introduction focuses on the activities of La Voz del Minero during the rather difficult decade of the 1980s.

In early 1985, the shortwave transmitter destroyed by the military[3] had still not been replaced, and the station was broadcasting on medium wave, with a power of 1 kilowatt, and on FM. When one Canadian radio activist visited the station in January or February of that year, the station had been off the air for three weeks "due to disagreements (supposedly in regard to salaries, and general political outlook) between the new leadership of the union and the station staff. The station was to return to the air on the following weekend, to broadcast the regional congress of the Central Obrera Boliviana, but the future beyond that time remained uncertain" (Whittington 1985, 37). Apart from the destroyed shortwave transmitter, the station equipment was reported to be in reasonably good order.

In 1987, the station broadcast for only ten hours a day, though the following year it returned to fifteen hours, from dawn to 8 at night. The mine workers were no longer supporting the radio station, and the five announcers were paid miserable salaries (US$10 a month) from income generated by the cinema owned by the union local. The station participated in the radio network during the 1986 March for Life and Peace, but because of radio interference the broadcasts were not a complete success. Again, it had to compete with Radio Pío XII, which participated in the network as a "pilot" radio station (Orozco 1989).

In 1988 a researcher from the Bolivian center for alternative media (CIMCA) found the station in difficulties because of lack of funding. The government considered it to be a "clandestine" radio station because it had not

[3] Orozco (1989) says that it was destroyed during the Barrientos epoch; Whittington (1985) that it was destroyed during the García Meza coup of 1980.

renewed its license.[4] Its technical deficiencies were a worry, and some of the staff were not paid at all. The station broadcast during the day and for part of the night but without defined programming. The news program was possibly the most stable, though it was working without scripts.

When I visited Llallagua/Siglo XX myself in August 1987, the station was only rebroadcasting the morning news program from the important Catholic station Radio Fides in La Paz (but more or less covering over the many advertisements with music). The transmission ceased at the end of the Fides news. Other stations available included Radio Nacional from Huanuni (at times rather faint), San José from Oruro, and of course the nearby Radio Pío XII.

One of the most important functions of radio in many parts of the world is to provide coverage of local and regional issues, which is the case here. However many of these news items are also of national significance.

Tape recordings are available of ordinary programming at La Voz del Minero on 6 October 1988. "Prensa Minero," broadcast at noon, is a well-produced daily program of local news, with a professional news reader, extracts from tape-recorded interviews or public speeches for each story, and musical flashes used to separate the different news items. Each item is covered in considerable depth and lasts for a few minutes. The program starts with a flourish: "The News Department of La Voz del Minero presents [sound effect of plane landing, music] Prensa Minera":

> The Prefect of the Province is incapable of solving the hunger strike of members of Siglo XX mining cooperative. Interview with a hunger striker who says that the Prefect did not attend a meeting. Different versions of the issues. The newsreader does not take a neutral stance but is sympathetic to the hunger strikers and quite ironic in tone about the futility of the Prefect's gestures.

[4] Murillo (1989) does not list the station as legally "clandestine," but it was in arrears on its license and owed US$2,780 to the government.

The Federation of Neighbours of the city of Llallagua is having an important evaluation meeting tomorrow. Representatives of the ten zones are asked to be present.

The teachers' strike in Uncía resulted in a two-hour road block yesterday. There is an extraordinary meeting today of teachers in three localities to decide on further measures in this struggle.

Secondary students plan a protest to support the striking urban teachers. This item has extensive commentary from a student leader, who reports on the conclusions of the students' meetings. The teachers are among the most poorly paid sector in the country. The students also support the hunger strike of Siglo XX cooperative workers: the right to work is fundamental. The students will have a protest march on Saturday in support of the teachers.

Zone Seven of urban Llallagua has been without water for three days; it is not certain why. A city official is interviewed who does not seem to have an explanation.

A conflict occurred today between two mining cooperatives over areas of work. There are accusations of political favoritism in the allocation of sites. Those who do not support the government cannot get their paperwork processed. A spokesperson for one of the cooperatives requests a provincial intermediary to resolve the conflict between "relocalized" miners and another mining cooperative. Extract from a speech at the conflict.

Update on an on-going dispute involving the Siglo XX mining cooperative and a robbery.

In the Llallagua town square over a thousand litres of illicit liquor from Argentina will be destroyed today at 4 p.m. The public is invited to attend.

The program ends with its musical theme (and the airplane sound effect): "Urgent news at any moment from Radio La Voz del Minero. Further national and international news from Radio Fides in La Paz."

Rescue Attempts

As a result of decades of government policy, corruption, and underinvestment, the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL) found it

increasingly difficult to compete on the world market. Because of a political decision by the Reagan government in the United States, the International Tin Council (which buffered rises and falls in the price of the metal to allow for rational long-term investment decisions) collapsed in 1985 and so also did the price of tin. The Bolivian government, at least partially motivated by a desire to destroy the miners' union, shifted national resources into petroleum and agribusiness. As thousands of miners lost their jobs and some of the mining camps became ghost towns, there also emerged a crisis in miners' radio. In many districts there were simply not enough miners left to support a radio station.

Around 1988, the crisis in Bolivian miners' radio was evident to activists and researchers in Bolivia and abroad. Among many articles drawing attention to the problem, the paper by Chilean researcher Raquel Salinas (1988) appears here as Chapter 8 (see also Kúncar 1989b; O'Connor 1989a, 1989b; Labor Notes 1989). There were also several campaigns by international activists to raise funds. The alternative media center CIMCA, headed by writer and activist Alfonso Gumucio, organized a conference in Potosí in November 1988. All of this activity did result in some material assistance, but the fundamental problem of the future of miners' radio was not solved.

There were basically two reasons for this. The first was the political crisis of the FSTMB and the COB in the face of the drastic measures taken by the government. The second reason has to do with intensely local history of most of the miners' radio stations. They often represented different political positions: remember Gramsci's formulations on the culture of the working class, which develops through a complex historical process and cannot be assumed to be unitary. In practical terms, there was little history of coordination of the radio stations by the national FSTMB in La Paz, except to demand their return when

they were closed down by a military coup. Any plan to rescue some of the stations meant allowing others to die. It was unclear how such decisions would be taken.[5]

The FSTMB was surprisingly inactive and did little about the radio stations for considerable amounts of time. The conference held by CIMCA (with some funding from the UNESCO office for Latin America) in November 1988 had some problems because many miners' broadcasters did not attend. Nonetheless it came up with a plan that included designating one station for each mining region: north, central, and south. This plan was adopted by the FSTMB at its XXII Congress, but little seems to have been done to put it into effect. There were also proposals to link La Voz del Minero with the University of Siglo XX, which had a Department of Social Communication.

Meanwhile a competing plan arose from Edgardo Vásquez, the president of UNESBO (the union of employees of radio stations from all trade-union sectors, including unions of factory workers and petroleum workers as well as of mine workers) and also the COB secretary of culture. He is a dynamic organizer, and, despite the rivalry between UNESBO and the FSTMB, at least some of the miners' radio stations were quietly working with him. Vasquez's plan involved saving a total of seven stations in order mainly to save the jobs of radio workers. It could also be argued that this plan was more sensitive to the history of differences between miners' radio stations. Many districts would be left with two miners' stations rather than only one. Many of the miners' stations remained on air only because of tremendous sacrifices by their radio workers. It seemed reasonable that they should be consulted, and naturally they were reluctant to go

[5] It seemed fairly evident to CIMCA in Bolivia and the Chilean-based communication researcher Raquel Salinas that the decision should be taken not by UNESBO—the union of union radio workers, which was founded in August 1987 (UNESBO 1989)—but by the FSTMB. The strongest point made by UNESBO is that factory workers' and campesinos' radio stations in Bolivia had a long history, were equally closed down by military coups, and also deserved attention. With respect to miners' radio, both CIMCA and Salinas despaired of the FSTMB's inability to make a decision in a way that would allow aid to be channeled to the stations (CIMCA 1988; Salinas 1989a, 1989b). It was clear to everyone that this was not an issue that could be decided by outside consultants and researchers.

along with the FSTMB plan that called for the closure of many stations. There also seemed to be unspoken political differences underlying the two plans.

And to complicate the situation further, many of the licenses for the miners' stations had lapsed and most owed the government for license fees (some of which had been withheld as part of a previous political protest). The government's Director General of Communications was willing to negotiate payment schedules but otherwise was applying firm pressure on the miners' stations. An immediate deadline was met with the help of a donation from Oxfam, the international aid organization, and there were also some smaller donations. But the crisis continued.

The collection closes with brief reflections by Bolivian media activist Alfonso Gumucio Dagron on the distinguishing features of miners' radio and on how communication researchers in North America ought to take note of this outstanding example of participatory media.

Chapter 1

Miners' Radio of Bolivia:

A Historic Experience of Self-Managed Communication

Fernando Lozada and Gridvia Kúncar C.[6]

Introduction

We want to draw attention to one of the most interesting and suggestive cases of self-managed workers' communication in Latin America and possibly in the world. Our intention is simply to tell about it, because until now there has been very little research published on this phenomenon. Through a quick sweep of its historical, social and political dimensions we'll make a first approach—for us the beginnings of a systematic and in-depth study. The topic of Bolivian miners' radio can be approached through four points that we consider important:

a) a historical overview of the rise and evolution of these radio stations
b) an exposition of why radio was the principal medium of the mine workers
c) an analysis of these media in light of Latin American theories of alternative media
d) perspectives on miner's radio that arise from the return to democracy in Bolivia today.

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[6] In Fernando Reyes Matta, ed. 1983. *Comunicación Alternativa y Busquedas Democráticas*. Santiago, Chile: ILET/Friedrich Ebert Stiftung. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

I. Emergence and Evolution

If the existence of more than twenty-five radio stations in the hands of the most advanced part of the Bolivian proletariat is a "discovery" that dates from only a few years ago, the stations' origins go back to 1947. In effect, the first antecedent is Radio Sucre, installed by high school teachers who worked in the mining districts of Catavi–Llallagua–Siglo XX. In spite of internal ideological differences, this intellectual elite expressed an anti-oligarchical nationalism in its irregular transmissions in the context of the mines (although it also manifested certain "vanguardist" pretensions). The mining workers and principally the union leaders observed this with a certain lack of confidence, although this novelty powerfully attracted their attention. The mining company (at that time owned by Simón Patiño, the principal tin baron) had located exactly where the equipment was, and, in the civil war of 1949, Radio Sucre was destroyed and those responsible for it dispersed.

With the advent of the National Revolution of 1952—which caused the fall of the mining companies' feudal state, the consequent reversion of its mines to the State, agricultural reform, and the universal vote, measures that modernized the obsolete structure of the oligarchic State—the miners (as the protagonists in the process) and the popular insurrection succeeded, among other objectives, in installing two radio stations in their most advanced centers.

In this way, shortly after the April revolution was achieved, in the Siglo XX and Catavi mining centers there emerged La Voz del Minero and Radio 21 de Diciembre. The example spread rapidly. Already by 1956 there were nineteen radio stations in the different districts, which came to comprise the network of miners' stations. From those first moments until the present we can distinguish—without being too reductionist—three stages in their development. This schema relates as much to the development of historical events as much as to milestones in communications. A first stage starts from the emergence of the first radio stations until the installation of the Catholic radio station Pío XII in Siglo XX. In

this period the stations functioned with short-range equipment (on average 220 watts) and rudimentary programming. It seems that these limits did not much worry the mining sector and its organizations. Three elements—union notices, the time, and musical themes—could characterize the functioning of the radio in this era.

The Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) powered the state Radio Illimani in La Paz in order to have a national reach and to act as the voice of the Service for Press Information and Culture (SPIC), spreading the ideology of "revolutionary nationalism." The MNR distributed radio receivers among campesinos, factory workers, and miners to make its presence effective at the national level. In some way the programming or "style" of this radio station influenced the miners' broadcasts, as did the transmissions of powerful Argentinean radio stations.

However, the intent on the part of the movement to politically influence miners' radio was systematically braked by the strong union fervor to which Trotskyists and Communists appealed, blocking any attempt at control. This happened from the beginning and especially since the distancing of the working class and miners from the MNR because of its conciliatory politics with imperialism shown by the petty bourgeois revolutionary nationalist leadership.

It should be mentioned that, if revolutionary nationalism did not manage to influence or control the miners' radio stations, neither did it control the direction of the Bolivian Trade Union Congress (COB), and this explains the absence of a COB vertical style in the unions, where the bases on occasion went beyond the Congress.[7]

[7] One cannot speak even now of a predominant politics in the COB on the part of the political parties that are represented in the high leadership of the Congress. For this reason one can never say that the COB is "communist" or Trotskyist, dominated by the MIR and much less by the PRIN. (The PRIN is a small party created by the highest leader of the COB, Juan Lechín.) On various occasions, the membership went beyond—through the unions or directly—the decisions, for example, to demand the giving of power to the victorious front, to changing the decisions of the Executive Committee of the COB, to proposing new elections (September '82).

Between 1957 and 1965 the number of radio stations increased and the network of miners' stations was expanded almost to thirty for an audience of approximately 32,000 workers in the nationalized mines, their families, the civil population, and the surrounding villages.

Pío XII Against Silicosis, Alcoholism, and Communism

As part of the conservative influence of the Church, headed by Pope Pius XII, a mission of priests of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate arrived in Bolivia from Canada in 1953. The task of this order, commissioned by the pope, was to save Latin America from a "communist revolution" whose center was located precisely in the Bolivian mining centers. With the object of combating this danger, the Oblates installed themselves in Llallagua and after a time came to the conclusion that the ideal means was the installation of a powerful radio transmitter to assist in the work of eradicating silicosis, alcoholism, and communism. This can be deduced from the first diagnosis of the situation sent by Fr. Maurice Lefebvre to his superiors. This priest started his work using transmissions through loudspeakers situated in the parish of Llallagua.

In 1959, the order received an international credit so it could construct the required radio station. In this way and for the first time, a radio station especially designed as such was constructed in Bolivia, with a physical and technical infrastructure that was the envy of the best other stations. In 1960, Radio Pío XII operated with 2 kilowatts of power, sufficient capacity to cover the miners' centers and a large part of the country.

Quite different from the precarious conditions of the miners' stations, the new ecclesiastical station had financial backing channeled in advertising obtained through a campaign to "prevent Communism coming to power in Latin America" and to which large commercial enterprises responded generously, especially those who had their parent companies in the United States and Europe. This availability of resources allowed the best announcers and scriptwriters in the country to be contracted. Likewise, the assistance of the government was evident. For that

moment, the mining proletariat had modified its initial critical support of the MNR because of the distancing of the government from the economic and political interests of the miners, until this sector gradually constituted itself as an opposition that grew in the period 1960–64.

Radio Pío XII came to offer professional programming. It came to be "the best in everything," constituting a boom not only in the mines but in all the country.

The "Modernization" of Miners' Radio

As a result of the appearance of a discourse in news and editorials at Pío XII that was openly anti-union, the workers' unions responded through their radio stations, unleashing a public and prolonged "war of the microphones." The head-on polemics between La Voz del Minero and Pío XII are memorable. The union radio station opened fire with an explosive anticlerical newscast, to which Pío XII responded. In this struggle, the people did not participate nor opt clearly for either side. It involved a conflict full of theoretical phraseology, unconnected with the mining reality. The intelligentsia of the Social Christian Party (PSC)—today the Christian Democrats—and on the other side the Communist Party and the Revolutionary Workers Party (POR)—Trotskyist—were the principal interlocutors of this daily diatribe.

On entering these rivalries, the political and communicational sense was devalued, and at the same time the miners' stations lost a certain representativeness when the leaders decided to invest in competing with the technical and professional programming of the Catholic station. In effect, the unions improved their personnel with broadcasters from the cities, paying salaries three or four times those received by the miners themselves. Thus, in 1961 a worker inside the mine earned 420 pesos[8] (about US$36) while broadcasters

[8] [The national units of currency, "Bolivianos" (abbreviated "Bs"), are also known less formally as "pesos."—Trans.]

contracted by La Voz del Minero received from 960 to 1,100 pesos. The competition implied disadvantages for the miners, as much in the visible inequality in economic resources as in the loss of potential in communication. This came to be understood by the leaders—like Federico Escóbar—who even determined to cancel the contracts with the "foreign" personnel. Following this strategy of copying the others, miners' broadcasting was destined to fail.

At the same time, the pain continued to grow virulently. In 1962 some excited miners dynamited the antenna and plant of Pío XII. Insurance replaced the damage, and in a short time it was transmitting normally. In 1963 another explosion silenced the religious station, in an act attributed to Trotskyists, who accused Pío XII of serving as official spokesperson of the mining company (COMIBOL) in justifying the Triangular Plan.[9]

The Conversion of Pío XII

The hard social reality of the mining context began gradually to exert its influence inside the Oblate order and consequently on its communication medium. At the same time, some radio workers native to the mines began winning space inside the station and its programming. In this way were inserted programs in the Quechua language, which reclaimed the humoristic form in order to criticize the government and COMIBOL. This team of radio workers and artists from the place[10] came to popularize the station, contrasting their language with the formality of the "white" professionals of Pío XII. In this way local programs like "Olla de Grillos" (roughly "Stew of Words"), "Ríase en Quechua" ("Laugh in Quechua"), etc., gained a growing listenership, taking advantage of the opportunity of a medium mainly co-opted by the "anticommunist" line.

[9] A plan imposed by international organizations (the Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, and Federal Republic of Germany) on the government of Paz Estenssoro (1956–60). They conditioned their assistance on wage and employment restrictions and also on the purchase of their equipment accompanied by their technical personnel.

[10] Among those stands out the well-known mining poet and journalist Jorge Mansila Torres "Coco Manto," to whom we own a good part of the information for this work.

It was actually at Pío XII where the first union of mining radio workers emerged in the year 1962 and proposed a wage agreement equal to that in the cities. Later unions were organized in the miners' radio stations, and they formed a federation, which in the beginning was not viewed very well by the miners' unions put in the position of being bosses.

From 1964 the Oblates had losses and changes in their ranks. The hard military and economic repression (wage reductions of 40 per cent) practiced by the military regime of General Barrientos—which in a bloody military coup eliminated the deteriorating MNR government—caused a dilemma between a progressive and a conservative position. From this conflict, a position won that was committed to a new social doctrine of the Church, which arose from the new winds of Vatican II:

> The Oblates then proposed a "fundamental" revision of the line of information and of their radio station, or alternatively its disappearance (...). The radio station of the Oblates which until then had been by definition an anticommunist medium and spokesperson of the Mining Corporation of Bolivia [COMIBOL], which was the same as being the spokesperson of the government, changed its anticommunism for a pastoral labor and spreading of the social doctrine of the Church (Rivadeneira 1980, 51).

Many priests did a 180° turn with respect to their previous positions. One of the most notable cases was Fr. Diego Loneville, who came to share days of work with the workers inside the mine; a radicalization that brought a true proletarianization. In the same way, Maurice Lefebvre in La Paz, one of the pioneers in anticommunist action, converted in contact with miners and university students. In his capacity as Dean of the Faculty of Sociology in the Universidad Major de San Andrés, Lefebvre was close to the student movement in La Paz and in some way to the guerilla movement of 1968–69.[11]

[11] This priest met his death when working in rescue operations of the Red Cross during the government coup of August 1971.

The Massacre of San Juan (June 1967)—shown in all its drama by film director Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau group in *The Courage of the People*—determined that Pío XII would be in its moment the most decisive and brave voice to denounce this tragic episode. This cost it the destruction of all of its installations, the persecution of the members of the Order as "syndicates of extremist agents," and radio broadcasters who were imprisoned or exiled.

The well-known and combative leader of the Miners' Housewives, Domitila Chungara, says in this testimony published in *Let Me Speak*:

> All those priests who came in that time, what they did, you see, was fight openly against communism. (...) Now everything is different, until a few years ago the radio Pío XII was working a lot in our favor. And if before the priests were not bothered with, now they were beaten the same as us, they were sent to prison and expelled from the country (Viezzer 1981, 202).

Thus opened what could be called the third stage in the history of miners' radio broadcasting. From the repression of Barrientos, Radio Pío XII came to align itself, to a good degree, as one more miners' radio station. From then the development and action of the miners' stations and the Catholic one are the same in cycles of openness and repression. Many times Pío XII is the first station attacked for its clear ideological and political work, denunciation and constant reflection on the reality of the mines.

It is worth emphasizing that, having once done this "conversion," Pío XII received relative autonomy with respect to the Order, which decided to leave the conduct of the radio station to the initiative of its workers—although without abandoning advice, assistance, and the partial donation of resources—sponsoring a drive toward self-management.

In turn, the miner's stations, once relieved of antagonism with the innovative radio station, recuperated certain principles for an optimum use of the media. Some radio stations began to structure their programs and news with better communicational criteria and the example was followed—according to the human resources and economic means. Courses were held for workers and students

interested in radio broadcasting to improve the level of programming. Contracting of foreign broadcasters was reduced, especially when there was proof of their disloyalty or irresponsibility in circumstances when the radio stations were occupied by the military.

In this way one could characterize this third stage as an action without the past antagonisms and with better coordination. From the city of La Paz, the Jesuit-run Radio Fides, with recognized prestige in news and programming, entered in daily contact with various mining radio stations to extend its much-listened-to national service. The Baptist radio Cruz del Sur also offered this service. Their credibility and good programs characterized both stations. Within their local needs, the miners' stations established reciprocal services of correspondents with radio stations in the cities of La Paz, Oruro, Potosí, and Cochabamba.

Approximately from 1964, this phase lasted until the present (the 1980s), passing through the progressive military governments of generals Ovando and Torres, during which certain basic liberties were enjoyed (1969 to 1971). With the right-wing coup of General Hugo Banzer came repression and silencing. The democratic process opened in 1978, precisely from the hunger strike initiated by a small group of miners' housewives and extended in all the country and wresting from the dictatorship a general amnesty. In all this the action of the radio stations was one of the most intensive. In this period a genuine closeness with the campesino sector was achieved. The programming came to the adjoining campesino regions, and effective communication was produced between the two sectors, which previously had been opposed because of the division caused by the MNR governments and fundamentally by the military regimes of Barrientos and Banzer. They imposed the "Military–Campesino Pact" to divide and cause conflict between the two sectors, which had more in common than the differences exploited by the dictatorships between dispossessed miners and small landowners.

In this way, the campesinos contributed not only by sending their products to the mining districts but also with their folklore groups, which played on

weekends in the radio auditoriums. Identifying with the music and programs and news in Quechua and Aymara, the campesinos of the north of Potosí, Oruro, and other places made the radio stations their own. Campesino markets in the mines were events that integrated the two sectors, and relations between campesinos and miners recovered through this solidarity. Because of this, one can understand the campesino mobilization in defense of the stations during the last coup of 1980. That would not have been possible in the previous decade, when the breach between miners and campesinos still had political force. The campesinos recovered their conscience when Banzer affected their interests and there were massacres in the countryside.[12] It was the campesinos closest to the mines who understood better the necessary alliance between both classes. At the same time, the miners abandoned their attitude of reserve and underestimation of the revolutionary potential of the campesino.

The fascist rabble of 21 August 1971 that toppled the progressive military government of General Torres and elevated the dictator Hugo Banzer in power came with tough repression of the miners' districts and their channels of communication. The majority of the radio stations were silenced, and others were occupied. Pío XII, Llallagua, and others came to be cut down due to the reaction.

In 1974, by government disposition, COMIBOL distributed five thousand television sets in the mines with the intent of distracting the attention of the mining community. The reflections of Domitila Chungara demonstrate the nature of this disposition.

> The television is controlled by the state. And from it the government wore us out (...) about the miners it says: "those crazies, those vagabonds, those reds," and we don't have a television channel where we can respond to them. We have only our radios. And to finish off this voice, they splintered us (...) Our radio stations, although in a brusque language, speak about ourselves, of our problems, of our situation (Viezzer 1981, 206).

[12] The bloodiest massacres occurred at Tolata and the Epinaza valley (Department of Cochabamba) in 1975.

One year later, in 1975, the army entered on a January morning and appropriated the instruments of work: music, recordings of leaders, tapes, microphones, and transmission equipment.

They seized radio workers and union leaders. The miners threatened to suspend work if the radio stations were not returned and declared themselves on strike. The government sent a commission to dialogue and negotiate with the strikers. Domitila Chungara, leader of the Housewives Committee and voice of a formidable collective memory, relates:

> The workers who were there said very clearly what they were thinking:
>
> "You have silenced our radio stations, which are important for us. You want us to go back centuries, where we didn't know about radio or anything. You want to submerge us in ignorance" (Viezzer 1981, 212).

In 1976 the Congress of Corocoro was held where important approaches of the working class were analyzed. The women of the Housewives Committee and other sections participated decisively. The principal resolution of the Congress was to give thirty days to the government in order to resolve the requirements of an increase in pay, reduction of the working day, minimal food necessities, liberty for those detained, and the reopening of the radio stations.

In June of the same year, the army entered without warning and punished those who worked inside the mines, principally those who had participated in the Corocoro Congress, who were imprisoned, and others were deported to the south of Chile, where Pinochet was already in power.

The military came to occupy the radio stations. In this situation the workers created a Strike Committee, which began to issue the first instructions for resistance. Already occupied by the military, the stations began to disseminate false news, creating confusion. They would say that 50 per cent and up to 80 per cent of the workers had returned to their labors. After twenty-nine long days of striking, without any other alternative, the workers were forced to return to work. This time, the pressure of hunger exerted by the dictatorship had got results.

In the beginning of 1978, again there recurred a hunger strike started by four women to demand the reopening of the radio stations, and principally a total and unrestricted amnesty for all the political exiles, who numbered more than three thousand. In less than two weeks there were already two thousand hunger strikers in all of the country. The movement won the approval of national opinion and extracted from the dictatorship the convocation of elections for the same year and a total amnesty. It was the popular movement that allowed for the democratic opening and the consequent process, which, as it happens, took place through three consecutive elections (1978–79 and 1980) in which the people used their right to elect their representatives.

The first interruption in this process was the coup of the official candidate General Pereda, to whom is attributed the triumphant overthrow of his patron Banzer on 21 July 1978. The miners' radio stations, joined in a chain opposing and resisting the coup, were punished. Radio La Voz del Minero in Siglo XX was almost completely destroyed. After the second elections came the adventurist coup of General Natusch in which outrages also occurred. Finally, a few days after the handing over of power, and when the results of the third election reflected more clearly the triumph of the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP), the process was again cut short by a neo-fascist action—following Argentinean strategies of terror—by the clique of García Meza and Arce Gómez.

The Coup of 17 July

During the events of 17 July 1980 the principal bastion of resistance was concentrated in the mining districts, whose radio stations continued—through the "Network for Democracy" calling on the people and the world to renounce the military assault, which truncated the democratic experience won by the people through more than a decade of de facto governments.

On 19 July, Radio Animas stopped transmitting because of a military occupation that followed hard fighting. The next day, Radio Nacional in Huanuni, the most powerful member of the network, was taken after great organized

resistance. Radio Vanguardia in Colquiri was equally silenced by intensive bombing by the Air Force.

In the Bolivian cities, where since the day of the coup a radio network piloted by the official Radio Illimani had been broadcasting, and in the exterior, people listened to the radios 21 de Diciembre, the Voz del Minero, and Pío XII, who continued until Wednesday the twenty-third denouncing the repressive actions of the army and calling for national resistance. The military circle was closed around the mining districts. The casualties were countless, as were kidnappings and detentions of workers' leaders. At midday on Wednesday the twenty-third, the vivid and dramatic transmissions were silenced. One more time a violent coup imposed bloodshed and fire...

Dynamite had been the one classic—although limited—weapon used by the underground workers in their constant battles for more than half a century against the repressive aggression of different governments. On this occasion, it was of great value to resist—and even in certain moments force back—the troops and officials. A mined circle was hung around some radio stations, a factor that prevented the immediate assault that was foreseen.

The difficult days of obstinate defense of a process of opening, for which the exploited classes also paid a price, were true examples of decision and solidarity. The mobilization of men, women, and even children, also with the campesinos of the nearby zones, was organized through the instructions and messages broadcast by the "Mining Radio Network," and its defensive action had as its principal objective to maintain, as long as possible, the continuity of the transmissions.

In these transmissions we can see aspects confirming the characteristics we will elaborate on in Part II and III, such as the following:

- An organization around the radio stations that quickly revealed the stations successively silenced by the military advance on the mining districts. This organization was headed by the oldest and most advanced centers, which instructed the younger centers to maintain the resistance.
- A participation of all the sectors, miners and campesinos, students, men and women through the microphones which gave information about the events: confrontations, the advance of troops and other "news," in this way making clear the position of the sector within the resistance.

The "Network for Democracy" radiated—from many places and various sources—information about the various mining encampments, villages, about the capital and other cities of the country, as well as commentaries from foreign radio stations. In the cities, these transmissions were followed and the press outside the country based many of their reports on them.

Its discourse included direct protagonists at the national and international level and illuminated the truth against the muffled media from the cities: "Ambush the disinformation, ambush the weapons."[13]

II. Why the Medium of Radio?

The answer to the question is necessarily found in factors that are historical, structural, cultural, and political, since the fact that a social sector would make radio into its principal medium of expression is neither accidental nor the result of only external factors. Thus, on the base of preexisting conditions, the miners are capable of reconverting radio from a predominantly one-directional medium that is favorable to the status quo toward their class necessity of organization and communication.

[13] A union leader's words (Gumucio 1982b, 15).

A. Historical, Social, and Political Factors

1. According to the census of population and housing of 1976, of the five hundred thousand workers who constitute the working class, the miners comprise only 9.2 per cent, but in 1980 generated 62 per cent of total exports (US$641.1 million). In spite of the nationalization of the mines in 1952, they continued to be the most exploited sector of wage workers and this has determined a consequent consciousness and combativeness which situated them as the most advanced among popular movements. The direct and permanent consequence of its union and political action has been the repression that they have suffered, especially during the government coups and the military dictatorships generated in Bolivia's convulsive political life.

2. The mineral deposits and mining districts, scattered in the hostile wild countryside of the Andes (the Departments of Potosí, Oruro, and La Paz) are isolated from the urban centers. This distance has meant a marginalization of this sector on the part of the dominant sector, an easier military incursion and hostage through hunger,[14] and on the other hand a greater necessity for cohesion, solidarity, and class consciousness. Thus, we encounter a rooted and irreducible union political action that "populist" governments have not been able to lessen; a clarity and maturity with which this sector has structured its union organization; and the use of the most advanced means to defend and organize itself, such as the radio stations. These media satisfy at a lower cost—compared with others—the need to overcome the difficult physical separation between the mines themselves and the rest of the country.

B. Cultural Factors

In order to understand the present dimension of miners' radio broadcasting we must refer to these factors, which play a role of primary importance.

[14] The *pulperías* or company stores provide food and basic products to the mining population at subsidized prices. In circumstances of social tension, the government of the moment has used their suspension as a means of pressure.

1. The community feeling engrained in the miners—essentially of campesino origin—has conferred very special characteristics on the union. In effect, the Quechua and Aymara roots whose community structure comes from the pre-Hispanic Ayllu, an institution in which component elements of the community life are analyzed, perseveres in the mining unions, which transcend the limits of labor-wage issues and even plays a role in mediating family and marriage problems. For this reason, union action goes beyond trade unionism and is active in internal spheres and also at the national level, as a pillar of the Trade Union Congress (COB).

2. The persistence of oral culture in the Quechua and Aymara languages, and also in Spanish, due to structural factors which make Bolivia one of the countries with a very high rate of illiteracy, is, in our opinion, determinative for the adoption of radio as a means of communication and not newspapers, which, comparatively, are much less developed. The value—almost sacred—conferred on the spoken word maintains its effect in the countryside just as in the mines.

This same oral tradition is also reflected in the fluidity with which miners communicate, especially in their maternal languages (which comprise a good part of the radio message) in programming that generally leaves a large margin for "improvisation."

Within the cultural legacy that the miners inherit, collective memory occupies a place of extraordinary value and force. The most important Bolivian filmmaker, Jorge Sanjinés, emphasizes this capacity to reconstruct the successive massacres they have suffered, in his film *The Courage of the People*, a film which makes evident this capacity and collective memory (see Sanjinés 1979).

3. The communicative relations are a reflection of social relations which are given within this sector within the dominated pole of society. In these relations the conventional division between senders and receivers is transcended in order to configure, in the context of the national problematic and class structure, social senders and receivers. This consciousness about the value of

communication to defend oneself, organize, and project one's reality and thought at the national level is present in every one of the miners' radio stations. From this the claim for the restitution and reopening of the stations has always been among their principal claims against oppressive regimes.

III. Miners' Radio with Respect to Alternative Communication

We will now attempt to situate the phenomenon of miners' radio starting from some characteristics and frameworks we consider validated by studies of what is called "alternative communication" from a Latin American perspective. For our part, we should say that alternative communication, as a phenomenon considered at a universal level, constitutes a social and political practice contextualized within a process of communication that embraces different modalities and available media in order to express—in an open discourse—a reality, thoughts, and positions different from and opposed to those that are dominant.

Social Practice

Within the elements which define the alternative character, social and political practice appears as a requirement: the creation and development of a historical space that confers its reason for being.

We are not going to abound in a characterization of the most advanced workers and popular Bolivian movement nor the dimensions and scope of its actions. It is enough to indicate its strategic importance in conditions of super-exploitation of the production of a social practice and political consciousness fully a part of national life, in the miners' Federated Union (FSTMB) and the Trade Union Congress (COB). This historical presence is a constant that is rigorously verifiable, even using empirical research methods.

This social praxis has determined—along with other factors—the necessity of media of expression and organization according to their interests and the availability of resources. This first characteristic fully responds to the

affirmation that "there is no alternative communication without a social practice that determines and ratifies it" (Reyes Matta, 1981/1986).

In the same way this social practice includes in itself a capacity to resist and confront, (that is, the "alternative" that Reyes Matta discusses [1981/1986]) where no assimilation is possible. The only way to control and censor is through violence. From this we can conclude that the miners' radio stations exist in two intermittent situations:

1. Emergent conjunctures (government coups and dictatorships) when radio forms a protagonist part of the resistance, acquiring a national dimension and range, even international. We consider that here in the middle of the repercussions of its political action, miners' radio taken as a collective entity could be considered mid-level communication and even—because of its political presence beyond the borders—macro communication.

2. In "normal" times (with basic liberties) radio reflects the local and national daily life, structuring programming substantially directed to the mining sector and serving as a channel for popular cultural expression, in good fellowship with the campesinos of the surrounding villages.

Self-Management

The initiative, probably assumed by the "organic intellectuals" of the miners' unions, to have radio stations that speak their truth and respond to their organizational and informational necessities is in every light a self-managed act of the sector in permanent confrontation with the dominant system. The union ownership of the stations—social ownership—and the self-financing of the same with monthly dues from the workers confirm a long trajectory of self-management, just as does their organic functioning through decisions taken by the union leaders, taken in conjunction with committees of members and with the members themselves in assemblies.

Resources and Sources of Information

Economic Resources. Basically the monthly dues of the workers, complemented by local advertising for services and a small amount of advertising for large shops from the city.

Human Resources. The mine workers of each radio station are responsible but also students and teachers from the area. In addition, the population from which they emerge collaborates and actually participates through access. Also the permanent help of the other radio stations, resulting in a flow of communication between them.

Technical and Material Resources. The technical infrastructure varies, according to the size of the mining center. The strength of the equipment is between 250 watts and 2 kilowatts. All the stations have special installations (booths, recording studios, pressrooms, offices, etc.) and some have auditoriums with different capacities. Also there is the necessary equipment for the work (and it has been replaced after being destroyed by the military) such as consoles, recorders, records, tapes, archives, etc.

Information Sources. 1) Miners' Journalism. The press departments cover local news and exchange it between themselves, so that regional coverage is guaranteed. 2) "Cultural" Radio Stations. National news and to a less extent international, comes in good part from "cultural" stations in the capital and other cities in the interior, stations such as Fides and Cruz del Sur. None of the radio stations have a Telex service, and neither is there any capacity to receive information from news agencies (monopolies or not). 3) Other. Newspapers, magazines, and publications received. Casual correspondents. Reception of radio from outside the country, etc.

Participation and Access

Against certain Manichean positions that consider only participatory communication that is totally horizontal to be opposed to dominant communication, we find here a conception and practices that are different but

valid. There is participation and access, which is shaped as part of an organization and community feeling, and where the role of the radio stations, in informing and interpreting the reality in which they are immersed, is mobilized. In this way, participation is constituted as a defining element of miners' radio. Although it is not the case that all the miners make use of the microphone, their full insertion in the reality and the concrete problematic makes them different from the alienation promoted by messages from the media in the service of the status quo. Participation implies at the same time knowledge and a critical and transformative consciousness of one's reality.

Due to the fact that reality imposes a way of doing things on the radio, access and participation also have different characteristics. In effect, the functioning and message of these media in times of "calm" and of "war" supposes participation and access that correspond to each situation. In the first case, there exist programs destined for workers, women, and students, where participation and access are channeled into structured programming. In the moments of emergency, when mobilization is absolute, every miner, housewife, student, and campesino can use the microphone to pass on information about forms of organization and resistance, to express the opinion of their sector, make known what has happened: the advance of troops, confrontations, etc. A document by Alfonso Gumucio Dagron presents an invaluable testimony in a transcript of a fragment of the dramatic transmissions of the National Miners' Network during the coup of 1980, where the participation of all the parts of the resistance just mentioned is evident in each of the radio stations, and to be at that moment connected together as interlocutors through the network constitutes an organic and horizontal amplification, which allows us to speak of a "spiral flow" (Gumucio 1982b, 15) circling through the integrating broadcast [see Chapter 4—Trans.].

In "normal" times the direct relation between sender and receiver is encountered—as we indicated in the historical summary—channeled in programs that inform, take opinions from the workers, those who through radio drama and

other forms recreate reality in their manner of conceiving the world. Within the "ideal profile of the perceiver" Pasquali conceives a relation between sender, collective being, and receiver *[EMERĒC]*, in which the distance between sender and receiver is transcended by a real communication (Pasquali 1980). In the case of miners' radio, as a characteristic dialogical principle, this distance does not exist all the time we are in the presence of social senders and receivers.

Discourse

The miners, in being a fundamental part of the Trade Union Congress (COB), share with it a discourse that is fundamentally mobilizing. In miners' radio, the reading of documents and resolutions of local and national unions is an intrinsic component of its informative activity. That which might be tedious for other audiences is actively listened to by the mining audience, where oral political–cultural discourse has the value of the written word.

The content of this anti-dominant discourse is oppositional (many times simultaneously), which we could summarize in this way:

1) Against the Company:

Justification of wages and foodstuffs in the company stores (*pulperías*). Local conflicts. Criticisms of the politics of COMIBOL.

2) Against the dominant system:

From the Political Theses and actions of the COB, specific local and national problems are analyzed in order to establish positions and decisions: anti-dictatorial and anti-dominant.

3) Anti-imperialist:

As well as a result of their active participation in the COB, the discourse and analysis always included this element, though at times in a rhetorical way. Nonetheless, its identification with Latin American struggles of liberation is more

than just rhetoric. For example, the miners decided to send one day's pay as a contribution to the reconstruction of Nicaragua.[15]

According to the slogan "there is no alternative communication without an alternative discourse" (Simpson 1981/1986), we could affirm in our case that miners' radio would not exist without miners' discourse, and this has been from the beginning anti-dominant and pro-worker, and in the last twenty years, anti-dictatorial and pro-democracy.

IV. Perspectives

Without having exhausted the points of view and considerations which the theme merits, it seems important to us to present, by way of a conclusion, at least an attempt to put into perspective what the miners' communication has done as an expression of its historical role, in relation to the democratization of the society and of communication in Bolivia since the reconquest of the democratic road.

A) Toward a Full Development of Union and Miners' Media

If certainly we should ponder that union media and especially the miners' radio has satisfied to a high degree the necessities of this sector, we should also remember that for many reasons, including violent repression (always moving between occupation–destruction by the army and return–reconstruction) they have not had the ideal conditions in which to develop.

To expand and improve their capacity to communicate (at the national level as well as in Latin America and the world), also to structure a more coherent programming starting from a redefinition and an approach to their media from a contemporary perspective on communication, transnational penetration, alternative communication and other elements, is a necessity which in no way devalues their admirable presence and action in their sector and nationally.

[15] The assembly in which this decision of solidarity with the people of Nicaragua was taken, like many others, was transmitted live by La Voz del Minero as a pilot radio and by various others who joined in a network with it.

It is possible that the present protagonists of the phenomenon of miners' radio broadcasting are not informed that this is considered a shining example, perhaps without parallel, of alternative communication, though, in reality, this is not as important as the steps they themselves consider necessary in the present. Even though these steps should be taken by those involved, we consider it possible that there could be collaboration, especially centered around action–research in which one sets out and discusses perspectives on radio and other forms of communication for the sector. There could be debate about problems of alternative media in the present national context and Latin America. Also about optimizing language and production of radio news, formats, and entertainment. In this perspective, the assistance of universities and centers for research and education should be channeled more toward the aspects just mentioned.

B) Miners' Communication Within Social and Communicational Democracy in Bolivia

The fact that there exists a popular movement that has imposed elected governments three times in a row allows one to glimpse the necessary steps which the UDP should take toward social democratization, within which is communicational democracy.

Until the present there exists a notorious vacuum of instruments capable of orienting and promoting a communication which truly responds to the real necessities of information, integration, and education of the Bolivian people in their varied and specific social and cultural characteristics.[16] The need for a national policy of social communication that overcomes the existing lack of

[16] In effect legal aspects of communication are still reduced to the 1925 Press Law, almost completely inapplicable because of its obsolescence and also because of other dispositions such as the Telecommunications Law and a government decree by which the State maintains a monopoly on television. There exists one national channel (State) and eight other university channels (at the Department level). One cannot speak of a strategic conception of communication expressed in a group of norms that respond to a clear and explicit politics for social communication.

defense against cultural penetration should in the case of popular media such as miners' radio, assist in its reorganization and offer—quite apart from any direction from above or paternalism—assistance for its development.

This assistance should mean:

1) Dispositions on the part of the Ministries of Transport and Communication which confer on these media the possibility of structuring themselves legally, and technical help with this. At present the majority of these radio stations are classified as "clandestine." This has not impeded their functioning—except in cases of coercion—but poses restrictions and obstacles for their defense and development. A "legalization" of these stations, also recognizing their social and communicational presence, should mean facilities for the importation of equipment, increase in strength and new frequencies, among other requirements. In sum, the miners' radio stations should not be blocked but rather assisted—should their promoters decide—to open broader horizons, increase their capacity for communication with all the country, linking up with other popular sectors and their media, enriching and aiding other alternative experiences at the national level, the international level, and between other peoples.

2) If the communicational structure reflects the social structure and the democratization of both structures in this democratic frame should be a product of a process of "social dialogue" for change, the planning and execution of a communications policy in this direction cannot exclude the participants of this process. For this reason, in addition to contemplating the autonomy of the union movement and the self-management of its media, this policy must guarantee and advance popular communication and its media, which have and will have much to say in advance, such as miners' radio, whose experience necessarily must be considered at the time of conceiving and practicing an alternative communication for Bolivia.

ANNEX: Partial List of the Radio Stations Operating in the Mines of Bolivia

1 NACIONAL in Huanuni
2 VANGUARDIA in Colquiri
3 21 DE DICIEMBRE in Catavi
4 LA VOZ DEL MINERO in Siglo XX
5 PIO XX in Siglo XX (*)
6 ANIMAS in Animas
7 VILOCO in Viloco
8 MILLUNI in Milluni
9 LLALLAGUA in Llallagua (**)
10 SAN JOSE in San José
11 SUMAC ORCKO in Potosí
12 TELAMAYU in Telamayu
13 LA VOZ DEL COBRE in Corocoro
14 TASNA ROSARIO in Tasna
15 CARACOLES in Caracoles
16 SIETE SUYOS in Siete Suyos
17 HUAYNA POTOSI in Milluni
18 JAPO in Japo
19 KAMI in Kami
20 MOROCOCALA in Morococala
21 MIRAFLORES in Maraflores
22 QUECHISLA in Quechisla
23 SANTA ANA in Santa Ana
24 CHOROLQUE in Chorolque
25 CHICHAS in Atocha
26 UNCIA in Uncía (**)
27 SANTA FE in Santa Fe
28 BOLSA NEGRA in Bolsa Negra

(*) Radio of the Oblate Order

(**) Municipal radio

The remainder are miners' union radio stations.

Chapter 2

Bolivian Miners' Radio:

Interview with Jorge Mancilla Romero

Héctor Schmucler and Orlando Encinas[17]

On 3 February 1982 a dispatch from a news agency gave the following information. "The military tentatively accepted the miners' plan to reopen the radio stations that were assaulted and closed following the coup of July 1980 led by General García Meza." On 9 March, the same agency said: "[T]he mine leader Pastor Alcócer affirmed today that the government is carrying out the agreement to rehabilitate the radio stations that were destroyed or suspended following the coup led by General García Meza."

Bolivia is perhaps the one Latin American country where workers' organizations have managed to appropriate electronic means of communication. From 1952 onwards, with the influence of the National Revolution,[18] diverse

[17] Jorge Mancilla Romero is a Bolivian journalist. He was born in the mining centre of Llallagua. He has lived in exile in Mexico City since the military coup of 1980 in Bolivia. This interview was first published in *Comunicación y Cultura* [Mexico City] in 1982. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

[18] The revolution of 1952, led by the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR), was a political, economic and social act of the greatest importance in the life of the republic of Bolivia. The triumph of the popular will, achieved through armed struggle, was endorsed through an electoral victory by revolutionary nationalism one year earlier but not recognized by then president Mamerto Urriolagoitia, who shortly afterwards gave power to a military junta. Immediately after April 1952, the nationalization of the mines and agricultural reform were carried out. Also unions were created and the Trade Union Congress (COB), popular organisms which quickly came to concentrate in their hands certain attributes of power and are recognized by the masses as the only authority and leadership to be obeyed.

organizations gradually adopted the use of radio as an instrument for their own communication. This is the case with the so-called "miners' radio of Bolivia."

At this moment in May 1982, the Bolivian miners, struggling for their wages and for democratic liberties in the country, demonstrate their capacity for struggle in the defense or restitution of their twenty-three radio stations, which on repeated occasions have been closed or destroyed by shots from the military.

Jorge Mancilla Romero, who directly participated in the birth of Radio Vanguardia in the mining centre of Colquiri, is considered one of the closest witnesses to the historical process carried out by the miners' radio stations through thirty years of their existence. Here are some passages from an interview carried out by the journal *Comunicación y Cultura*.

The Necessity of Integrating the Country

One frequently hears discussion of Bolivian miners' radio as a unique event in the experience of popular communication in Latin America. Still not much is known about the stations. On the other hand, much is known about the dramatic history of Bolivia, with successive repressive systems. How could one explain the rise and continued existence of such a powerful means of communication as radio in the hands of the workers?

I believe that the case of Bolivian miners' radio is one of the most important phenomena in global communication, because there is no other similar experience in radio. As much for the motivation and how it is carried out... without a director, without express instructions, without direction from the government or the higher level of the union.

The complex of miners' radio stations was born as a necessity from below, from the base, immediately after the triumph of the National Revolution of 9 April 1952. In reality, the necessity for communication between Bolivians

emerged just after the Chaco War,[19] which lasted from 1932 to '35. Before Bolivia was a disarticulated country, incommunicado and divided in regions... I believe that from this rose the necessity of integrating the country, a necessity that even now has not been satisfied. Every soldier who participated in that war is a living witness of that torment, in which more than fifty thousand Bolivians died. Three or four years later they came to realize that they had been fighting for foreign petroleum corporations that settled their disputes with Bolivian blood. Through the poetry, the songs, and the stories of the Chaco war, Bolivians began to know themselves.

Then, starting from the experience of the Chaco war a nationalist line was identified...

Exactly in 1941 the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR)[20] is born and there are the first intentions at communication, through what was called Radio Bolívar, which functions in the interests of this party without saying so, naturally. It operated a bit clandestinely preparing the revolution of '52.

It was a clandestine project...

Not exactly clandestine because it was a public radio station. Just from there worked those who afterwards would be leaders and ideologues of the MNR, like Carlos Montenegro, editorialist of Radio Bolívar, José Felmen Velarde, and others, who had political and cultural anxieties. These needed an instrument to

[19] Daniel Salamanca—called the patriarch of the republicans—who assumed the presidency in March 1931, had decided to "walk strong in the Chaco." Salamanca fell into the trap of Standard Oil Company and Royal Dutch, two consortiums who disputed for monopolistic control over Bolivian petrol. These, seconded by Argentine and Brazilian militarism urged on the war between Bolivia and Paraguay. Of this experience Guzmán Galarza wrote: "The ex-combatants returned convinced that they and the country had been betrayed. In memory of more than fifty thousand Bolivian soldiers buried in the inferno of the Chaco, the survivors swore to construct a new country."

[20] The generation of the centenary, that which had fought in the Chaco threw itself into the task of political organization. The young military created the Rational Lodge for the Fatherland (RADEPA), and among civilians two tendencies took shape: the Marxist left, which in 1940 founded the Leftist Revolutionary Party (PIR), and revolutionary nationalism which solidified in 1941 with the foundation of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR).

transmit massively the terrible experience of the Chaco and the great event of founding a political party after the war. Then, as much as Radio Bolívar might be commercial, it was there that for the first time political opinion was introduced against the "super mining state" made up of Patiño, Hochschild, and Aramayo.[21]

This, of course happened outside the mines... What happened meanwhile in the mining centers?

In 1948–49 a clandestine radio station appeared in the mines, called Radio Sucre. The reason for this secrecy has never been determined. Nonetheless, no doubt it belonged to a Falangist[22] sector, that is, right-wing nationalism, especially led by teachers who graduated from the teaching college (Normal Superior) in Sucre. At that time (1948), the Patiño corporation took the best teachers and doctors for its mines at Siglo XX. It was a kind of prize for these professionals.

Teachers and medical services for the miners...

Yes, specifically for the miners.

It is interesting, this interest of Patiño in bringing professionals of such quality, meanwhile exploiting the men without much consideration.

Really, this charity from Patiño had the purpose of compensating in some way for the abuses committed in the exploitation of the mines. In addition, it appears that because of it he paid less tax to the state. They were enviable services.

Then the teachers...

[21] For the thirty years before 1952, Bolivia was trapped by the network of interests of the "tin barons" or the "supreme trinity of fraud": Patiño, Hochschild, and Aramayo, even to the extent that the state assumed heavy obligations with North American bankers. As Raúl González says in his book *Bolivia: El Prometeo de los Andes* (Ruiz Gonzalez 1961), by 1930 the great mining companies had internationalized with stockholders in the United States, particularly Patiño Mines and Enterprise Consolidated Inc., Bolivian Tin and Tungsten Mining, Compañía Agricola Oploca de Bolivia, and Soc. Empresa Estaño Araca, which belonged to Simón I. Patiño.

[22] This is a reference to the Bolivian Socialist Falange (FSB), which since before the National Revolution of 1952, was linked with the interests of the national oligarchy. The Falangist recruitment base had always been among secondary and university students who formed the legions of the "white shirts" with images and similar to all the fascist groups that had swarmed as assault groups against the popular movements.

That group of teachers launched Radio Sucre, which functioned with Dr. Solares's small equipment, only a few streets from the police in Llallagua. Curiously, nobody knew where it was. Also, in Bolivia at that time, radio was not very widespread. There were one or two radio receivers in all the town of Llallagua, located especially in the Plaza del Minero, where the people gathered in order to hear transmissions from outside the country: from Argentina, Chile, etc. But suddenly a radio station appeared that talked about local problems, which excited the people. In an epoch in which not even loudspeakers were in fashion. And the people said: "How can it be that from the same apparatus there comes talk of Llallagua, of Siglo XX..." Radio Sucre had the life of a mayfly, without more importance for politics or the unions.

The Fever of Union Radio Broadcasting

Until this moment one could consider two specific experiences which attempt to use radio politically in Bolivia. What context is linked with the appearance of the miners' radio stations?

In Catavi there emerged another radio station, 21 de Diciembre, in homage to the fallen miners of the first great massacre of 21 December 1942. Then, almost immediately after, there came from the same base, from below, Radio Nacional de Huanuni. This provoked a fever of union radio stations that spread especially from the mining sectors. Every one of the unions hurried to get technical and legal facilities (from the government) in order to install their station. The activity multiplied. Who would have the contacts in order to purchase such expensive equipment? Who would put it in place? What business would supply it? Then there came a moment when there was an unequal and feverish competition between unions to see who would have the most powerful transmitter, who would have the most records and the best microphones... The ideal was to have Ampex equipment...In short, until 1963 there existed twenty-three functioning miners' radio stations in all the country: La Voz del Minero in Siglo XX, Radio Nacional in Huanuni, San José in Oruro, 21 de Diciembre in Catavi, Colquiri in Colquiri,

Radio Vanguardia also in Colquiri, Radio Santa Fé in Santa Fé, Radio Morococala in Morococala, Radio Milluni in Milluni, Radio Bolsa Negra in Bolsa Negra. In the south, Radio Animas, 9 de Abril, Choroloque and Siete Suyos. Also there is Radio Chichas in Atocha, Radio Pulacayo in Pulacayo and the famous Radio Pío XII, about which I want to tell you more later.

The mine is in Siglo XX and the machine where they process the tin in Catavi, two different realities in the same social context. In the first is the hard people, the "brutes," the people most exploited, who are the people inside the mine. In the second, in Catavi, are the administrative employees and workers in mechanical and electrical workshops.

They are the immediate antecedents of the miners' radio stations. In reality the first miners' stations appeared on the air in 1952 and 1953. La Voz del Minero, from the Siglo XX mine is a pioneer of this great experience in radio broadcasting. It was the epoch after the triumph of April, of the nationalization of the mines, with the influx of revolutionary emotion.

How much of the national territory was covered by these twenty-three miners' stations?

That is important because curiously those twenty-three radio stations are located in 20 per cent of the national territory, in competition, almost without caring, with the commercial radio stations that are in La Paz. Although, to be sure, the miners radio stations have a different structure. They are more local: their strength is some cases only reach 500 watts. In my area, for example, in the province of Bustillos, where the largest tin mines are (Llallagua, Siglo XX, etc.) there came one epoch, around the year 1961, when there were five radio stations for a population of 50,000 inhabitants. A few streets separated these stations. But each radio station was an island with its transmitter, its reason for existing, its programming, its own problems, even though the problem was shared. There was no entity to coordinate...

With No Previous Technical Training

In general terms one could say that there are twenty-three radio stations in the hands of the mining workers of Bolivia. But the cost of maintaining and operating a radio station is really high... What do the miners do in order to finance them with wages that are less than the minimum needed to live?

The radio stations survive through the direct contributions of the workers because of the strength that they signify. The workers determined that they would deduct fortnightly a percentage of their already low wages. These workers support their stations without asking for accounts of what is done with their money.

But someone must have taken charge of the administration of the radio stations?

During those first years—until 1963, let's say—the director of a miners' radio station was a person with no training in questions of radio. In general the secretary of culture of the union occupied this position. Who do the miners choose as secretary of culture? The most read person in the place, the most lettered. To put in on another way: the teacher. And among the teachers, the one who shouted most, the one who spoke most, although they might not necessarily be a cultured type. In other words, the one who knew how to insert themselves into the union. In those times it was the secretary of culture of the union who by right was the director of the radio station. After that the radio personnel chose the director. Announcers were sought because of their voice. There was no problem in putting in people who had no political or technical preparation: that was not a requirement. People were sought with some talent, it could be a boy who knew how to recite or a man who knew how to sing: that's it. .

That could bring negative consequences to the union itself.

The higher union organizations such as the Federated Union of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB) did not make an immediate analysis of this phenomenon. Even less the Bolivian Trade Union Congress (COB). The radio stations are isolated forces, with their own separate budgets, without giving any

explanation to anybody about this and only at the pleasure of the secretaries of culture of the unions. Bit by bit, in many cases, radio was distorted, because the secretary of culture, who is the "owner of the radio station" (or has this status among the people) interrupts any program to play discs for the fiesta of his godfather (*compadre*) or friend, and make an hour of music for that fiesta.

As well as satisfying this particular desire of the godfather or friend of the director, there would be regular programming.

Generally the transmissions of a miners' station are from six to eight hours daily, with breaks. At the hours when they give electricity in the mining town... Normally the transmissions kick off at five in the morning, which is the hour when the miners' work starts. Then, the first transmissions are from 5 to 8 in the morning. After they restart at 12 until 2 in the afternoon. In the afternoon they broadcast from 6 until 10 at night. Those are the hours, more or less when they give electricity to the mining camp. The programming is made up of Mexican *ranchera* music, Argentinean music, Bolivian music, with readings of union and sports communications and summonses (*citationes*). In general they were a kind of record player and clock. Nonetheless, even in those conditions at times the radio stations succeeded in gaining power, on occasions over their own union. Sometimes the announcers were more popular and even more important than the union leaders. For example, workers could come and denounce their highest union leader in front of the announcer. For the worker, the announcer had more authority than their own union leader; and that leader would fall if the announcer pledged to discredit them.

The Transforming Presence of Pío XII

For many years miners' radio is separate from political and social problems until Radio Pío XII is founded in 1959.

The Mission of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, which had already been in the mines for six years, installed this radio station called Pío XII in homage to the Catholic pope, with a tremendously anticommunist line in its political

ideology, with an enviable organization and discipline in its programming, the education of the announcer, the ideological formation of the announcer. This is verified by the characteristics of the building, which was not an adaptation like the union radio stations that functioned in a room given them by the unions. They constructed a building according to radio criteria: recording studios, pressrooms, recording booths, record library and living accommodation for the announcers who came from the cities.

The radio station was installed in Siglo XX and was a kind of fort where not just anybody could enter. The person who conceived this project certainly thought to have something like a monastery or convent because it had the radio workers there, with food and living accommodation, without going out in the streets. They prepared during the hours when they were not doing the radio. They read and accommodated themselves to an ecclesiastical scheme. The priests were those who worked in this way and trained the announcers. This was the first time in which things were like this. Between 1959 and 1961 their people were prepared for the combat which they were going to give when "things turned communist." Because that was the criteria: the miners' centers were communist foci. Llallagua and Siglo XX were the most tense politically, because they were the strongest conduits of the Bolivian economy. As is known, tin pays the wages for Bolivia.

You said that announcers were brought from the cities to work in Radio Pío XII...

Yes, the best announcers in the country were there and the best paid. They searched for people with the most intelligence and with microphone presence, we could say... Then there arrived some twelve people from the big cities: a good newsreader, eight good announcers, dramatists, a good record librarian, the best recording technician etc. Really they sought the best and they paid very well.

You mean that there was much difference with respect to local wages.

A great difference. For example, if the pay was 210 pesos, the same as the monthly minimum wage, the medical doctor earned 650 pesos. I'm speaking

about the announcer of Radio Pío XII, not the miners' radio stations. Another example, I have a brother who started to work very young in the mine, at seventeen years. My brother had in that epoch something like fifteen years working for that company and earned a monthly pay of 450 Bolivian pesos and I, his younger brother, working at the radio station, earned 1250 pesos. That was the difference.

Certainly this technical presence of Radio Pío XII affected the activity of the miners' stations...

Of course it affected them. That radio station imposed a system of work, really admirable. But also exemplary, because it was really organized. It seemed like a little battalion that was starting to function, which woke the miners' stations up from the lethargy in which they had fallen. The miners' radio stations had lost eight years in blunders. Mobilized by the unions and by some political organizations, they started to improve, to demand more from the announcers. Not to demand more political training, but that they not drink so much, that for a women's program they not read magazines like *Reader's Digest*. Although, true, nobody controlled what they said, only how they said it: in a good voice.

Therefore, Pío XII came to be an important wake-up call, a mover in that situation. The union radio stations began to ask themselves why they could not be like Pío XII. "What is needed?" asked the workers. Then the answer: "Money, *compañeros*." The reaction did not lose any time: "We are going to double the dues and search for the best announcers in the country."

And they went to look for the second-best announcers in the country, because the best were already at Pío XII. In a short time the people arrived and somewhat improved the quality. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Radio Pío XII transmitted with 2000 watts, which covered almost all the country and was heard beyond the borders, while the others were "fussing around" with 300 or 500 watts. Pío XII had a total radio presence. It was extraordinary musically and in its radio drama: terrible and hasty in its news. It was a constant denouncement

of "Castro-Communism" and against that bearded one on the island. The attention of the United States to that radio station was clear because the news was selected to manifest the rejection of the Cuban Revolution. Also, there was news that helped COMIBOL (the Mining Corporation of Bolivia),[23] which had supplanted in another form, Patiño, Hochschild, and Aramayo.

Radio Pío XII, although certainly it caused a reaction among the union radio stations to improve their technical quality, was a real threat against the workers' organizations. What was the answer of the workers against this threat? Pío XII was so good, so powerful and hasty that it gained definite enemies who came to dynamite it. Mining workers dynamited the radio station twice in one or two years and persecuted the announcers.

These actions which the workers took were part of a political project...

No, they were anarchic. They were outraged because Pío XII was defending COMIBOL so much that it attacked the union leaders—not the union. Because Pío XII took care not to attack the unions. They attacked Fidel a lot and said a lot against alcoholism, against drunkenness, against vices, without proposing another alternative except the Bible or the "Word of God." None of this had anything to do with the hard and violent structure of the mine, and for this reason the reaction of the workers against the aggression of Pío XII was gut feelings.

The resources that it took to maintain Pio XII must have been enormous.

To start Pío XII had a big budget from somewhere... "from God" perhaps. As we said at that time, "God helps them." In reality the Canadian Oblate Mission

[23] From when the MNR nationalized the mines, state companies such as the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL), Bolivian State Petroleum Wells (YPFB), the Bolivian Development Corporation (CBF) and other companies recently created such as the National Smelting Company (ENAF) and SIDERSA, in charge of the exploitation and industrialization of iron, kept the company laws of the epoch of the oligarchic state, and for this reason, were never under the direct financial and administrative control of the state. (René A. Mayorga, "Dictadura Militar y Crisis del Estado: El Caso Boliviano," *Cuadernos Políticos* No. 20).

or the Vatican. Also, since it had gained the sympathy of the government, it gave aid that was needed at whatever moment.

Reality Mattered More Than the Sermons

But here came something interesting. In 1965 at Pío XII something important happened. As much as it was indoctrinating and dogmatic, the announcers had no alternative and sounded empty continuing to talk about great scientific advances, through programs from Dutch radio, the Voice of Germany, etc. A conflict emerged among the priests of the Oblate mission themselves. They could not continue just being spectators of the tragedy that was happening among the people. Also, some two or three years earlier a union had been organized at the radio station. This union proposed some changes to the priests. For example, that announcers from the town be paid the same as announcers brought from the big city. The union leaders were fired. When the mine workers got to know about that, they supported the demands of the Pío XII union. But nothing more happened because other bigger struggles came along that I'm going to mention later.

All of this certainly had repercussions on the attitude of Radio Pío XII toward the mine workers.

There was definitely a change. One could consider '65 the year in which the Oblate Mission said goodbye to the ideological mindset, which had been there without change since 1952. From '65, Radio Pío XII converted itself into what is called "the voice of those without a voice." From that time, when the other radio stations were closed down, the workers turned up at the only means of protest and communication of their demands, Radio Pío XII, now committed to the workers' cause.

As one can see, Pío XII lived through a process of transformation, so rapidly that in '67 reactionaries labeled it as a communist radio station. The founder of the station—Lino Gremier—who had arrived with the mission of undoing the union organization and "pulling up the root of communism" was no

longer there. Progressive priests came, let's say, with a clear awareness of what was going on. And how could it not be this way? Little children died in their arms, they saw women dying in childbirth because they had no medical attention... and miners who died from silicosis. The truth is that reality mattered more than their sermons. Those priests took account that Radio Pío XII was not the answer to those concrete necessities. Because of all of this, we saw many of the priests involved in the unions, contributing to the workers' struggle, as was the case with Mauricio Lefebvre.

Military Aggression Against the Radio Stations

In 1965 there was this great "ideological awakening," as you call it, in Radio Pío XII. Overall, the rest of the miners' radio stations, as well as this preoccupation to improve the technical quality of their transmissions—what were they doing?

Yes... I'm going to go back a little bit. In 1956 the government applied what is called "monetary stabilization," after the economic blockade which the United States established with the aim of domesticating the National Revolution of '52. There was a very strong inflation until 1956, when Dr. Siles[24] took power and agreed to the International Monetary Fund. Then what is called the "Triangular Plan" was applied, a plan that was announced as the "salvation" of Bolivian mining. It was made up of the International Monetary Fund itself, the Interamerican Development Bank (BID), and a German organization. Three powers to "save" Bolivia, but with the condition that the following program was followed: a certain pay reduction, a rise in the prices of certain products—in short, a program toward a new dependency.

[24] Hernán Siles Zuazo, leader of the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP), president of the republic from 1956 to 1960. After the fall of the Banzer dictatorship, Siles emerged not only as the head of the Left MNR (MNRI), but also as the winning candidate in three consecutive elections (1978, 1979, and 1980).

There was not a great deal happening at the radio stations. From 1956 to 1958 the station itself transmitted only communications such as this: "Workers are called to an assembly this afternoon in order to consider how to handle the emergencies that the Triangular Plan involves"... "To continue we are going to listen to this..." Not even the political parties used the radio. That is to say, even the political parties gave little importance to the radio stations. They preferred to continue with their little pieces of paper, with their little pamphlets, with their little newspapers, especially the *compañero* Trotskyists, knowing that 80 per cent of the mining population did not read... or better said, did not know how to read.

In 1965 there was the first big massacre since 9 April 1952. It was the first "red" massacre. Before there were "white" massacres: the mass dismissals of workers. The red massacre is with blood... Then, in 1956, what the great writer don Sergio Almaraz afterwards called the "May System" was installed in Bolivia, so called because it was in the month of May of '65 that a scale of wage reductions was initiated, dismissals of workers, deportation of leaders, their imprisonment, their "disappearance," and the sending of troops to the mines. Until then, from '52, there had not been troops in the mines. In '65 the unions disappeared, the leaders were imprisoned, some 1,200 workers and about forty leaders were thrown out of their jobs and went as exiles to Argentina and Chile. In all, in '65 a national disaster was produced and the first big offensive against the miners' radio stations, which even disappeared.

They were closed...

No, they were destroyed by the military.

But why were they destroyed? You were saying that the miners' radio stations hadn't undertaken any political action...

That was in the first stages. But by then the stations had organized themselves. And they confronted the government politically and confronted imperialism. They had forgotten about singing things about '52, to remember things about the Chaco because by then they had identified the concrete enemy,

which is North American imperialism, represented in Bolivia by the International Monetary Fund, the famous Triangular Plan, and the impositions of the North American ambassador—Mr. Henderson—who then was the Super Minister of the MNR. Because then the MNR was already at the feet of imperialism: it gave away the Revolution and raised its arms in the air in order to fall into the claws of the military.[25]

Because of all that in '65 there was the total silencing of the radio stations, with destruction of the equipment by the military. Not confiscation but their destruction. They fired shrapnel at the equipment, the records, and everything that they found in the installations. And also they began to persecute the announcers.

Through all this, Radio Pío XII continued transmitting...

Yes, because it had taken a road that was more educational than political: education for literacy. In that time, Pío XII undertook a big project in the countryside, distributing without charge some fifteen hundred radio receivers on FM for a captive audience. They formed a little regiment of rural schoolteachers who assisted groups of listeners. But at the same time, in its process of transformation it did not stop attacking the military regime of René Barrientos.

As you know, in 1967 a guerrilla movement headed by "Che" Guevara was installed in Bolivia. By then, as I was telling you, Radio Pío XII was seen as a communist radio station. The "Massacre of San Juan" was produced on 24 June, when the miners' expressed their moral assistance of the guerrilla movement. One could not say material assistance because the miners were in no condition to do this. Nonetheless, they were disposed to: if their *compañero* guerrillas needed money they would ask for it. They said: "If they let us know through their

[25] Cayetano Lobet writes in the review *Historia y Sociedad*, No. 21: "In 1964 the lowest point in the revolutionary decline was touched. The regime of General René Barrientos (an Air Force officer) gave the knife to the party that conducted the most impressive popular insurrection in Bolivian history. (...) When the MNR disregarded the contemporary reality, maintaining its stubborn anticommunism and trying to develop a national capitalism in the middle of an imperialist reality, there started its suicidal process, from then inevitable. Just by opting for the imperialists' card and not for the workers' project, it opted for the least dignified suicide. On its knees and opening wide the doors of the reactionary repression."

contacts in the city, we will see how we can help them." The guerrillas, lost there in the jungle, were pitilessly massacred, as were the miners for aiding them.

Curiously, Pío XII was not even attacked. Nonetheless, not much time passed until it was. In a few months it had the same luck. What happened was that Pío XII had openly taken on the defense of the workers. There were no longer announcers brought from the cities. There were only announcers formed among the people, who assumed the leadership of Radio Pío XII. All together, the other radio stations were silenced until 1969 when General Barrientos died...[26]

When General Barrientos died, then Vice-President Luis Adolfo Siles assumed power...

That's it. But later that same year rose General Ovando,[27] who made a short-lived democratic and progressive government and gave the radio stations back to the miners. The stations returned to operation until 1971, and in the coup of General Banzer were once again destroyed. In reality, they lasted from the month of September of '69 until 21 August '71, when General Juan José Torres...[28] In this interval the stations tried to get to know themselves again and to

[26] René Barrientos Ortuño, Vice-President of the republic in the last period of the MNR government (1960–64). With Alfredo Ovando Candia he led the coup d'état of November 1964, which overthrew Víctor Paz Estenssoro. He stayed in power until the year 1969, when because of an air accident he died in the region of Cochabamba. Sergio Almaráz would write about the coup of 1964: "It is evident that the North Americans boosted Barrientos. He did not do it through a 'ukase,' nor hitting the table. It was a long process which began with Andean action squadrons agreed to by the MNR and more or less directed from Panama. But it was effective because the president made a green beret and a green beret made the President."

[27] After the death of Barrientos and the succession of Luis Adolfo Salinas, poor and unpredictable, there was a coup which brought to power General Alfredo Ovando Candia. His surprising politics, promoted by his ministerial team, dictated nationalist measures such as the nationalization of Gulf Oil and permitted the reorganization of the workers' organizations, principally the Federated Union of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB) and the Bolivian Trade Union Congress (COB).

[28] On 7 October 1970, General Ovando Candia was overthrown by a triumvirate constituted by three arms of the military forces. In a notable political act and with the help of the most important nuclei of workers and progressive sectors of the army, General Juan José Torres proclaimed resistance to this junta, convoked the workers and was made president. The triumvirate came to last for only a few hours. The government of Torres stood out for its nationalist politics and for having permitted the political rise of the workers' movement with the inauguration of what was called the "Popular Assembly," where the miners' organizations had a predominant role. But

remember what they had done before the long silence and repression. But in '71, night fell again on Bolivia until '78, the year in which one more time some of the stations were returned to the miners.

So from '71 to '78 the miners' radio stations were silenced...

That's it ... except for a few of them during a brief period.

Also Pio XII.

Pío XII was also silenced in '71, but in '73 reinitiated transmissions along with some of the miner' stations for a very brief period, two years. In '75 it was closed, but not destroyed. By then Radio Pío XII has been totally radicalized. Now it was not simply denouncing but confronting the government and COMIBOL. It was precisely in '75 that it was closed by the Banzer regime because it was adopting an attitude of open and decisive support for the miners' strikes that occurred in that epoch.

You said that in '73 some of the miners' radio stations restarted transmissions...

Effectively so. In the year '73, after an insistent protest to Banzer, some of the stations came to transmit, but under absolute control of the government. In '75 they were brutally finished because they were participating, now in a direct way, in the preparation of a general mining strike, which came to last forty-eight days in truly dramatic conditions, with a military and economic siege of the mines. Then the silencing of the radio stations lasted until the fall of Banzer in 1978, until the triumph of the historical hunger strike that brought down the dictatorship.

the military coup of 21 August 1971 undid this process, imposing a fascist regime headed by Hugo Banzer Suárez, which stayed in power until the year 1978, when it was overthrown by popular forces.

Miners' Radio Stations as Instruments of Political Power

From your account one could consider that Radio Pío XII and the other miners' radio stations continued integrating themselves in the organized workers' movements in the mining centres...

In effect, yes. It should be clarified that Radio Pío XII had turned into one more miners' radio station. In moments of emergency it had headed the networks of miners' stations in order to mobilize the union organizations.

It would seem that miners' radio plays a different role in times of peace than in moments of struggle.

I believe that the stations turned themselves from 1956 into the cultural, political, and social centre of the miners' districts. A man who had problems with his neighbour did not go to the police, he went to the radio. He looked for the announcer, he didn't look for a lawyer. A man who had problems with his children went to the announcer. If there were marital difficulties the woman went and said: "Please, I want to denounce my husband in your news program because he beats me." "But, señora—the announcer replies to her—go to the police or to the priest." "No here I want to have justice. I want that all the neighbours to know how my husband is so they'll help me."

Everything circled around the radio. There was a school dance, for the young people—the radio station had to transmit that dance. Any collective act: sporting, social, or cultural and also political or union, the radio station had to be present.

All the stations more or less fulfilled this role.

Absolutely. They fulfilled this role. Because even though the announcer sometimes resisted going to a dance and transmitting it, they had to go: it is a union radio station and they are the children of workers who have organized that party.

This happened in the moments of peace, or let's say, more or less when there is a certain tranquility in the miners' communities...

And because of living directly with the people, when moments of national emergency came, the first thing that was done was to defend the radio station. The people knew what they had and what it could do... The defense of the miners' district was concentrated around the radio station and specifically around the microphone. It is the first thing that must be defended and the last to fall, because the first thing that the army did was attempt to silence the radio station.

They were afraid that it could mobilize the union organizations...

It is the central mobilizer. It totally suspends its normal programming in order to attend to the emergency. What's more, when the union declares a state of emergency, the first thing the radio station does is suspend its programs and say: "People, from this moment there are emergency transmissions." In that way—no more interest in whatever music—the important thing is to maintain its presence and put the population on alert about what might happen. There are communications such as this: "We invite workers from such a section to gather in such a place" or "Go to defend such a place, because it is assumed that the army troops will enter from there... and advise us what happens."

In reality, radio in Bolivia is a great political instrument, not only because of the case of miners' radio but because it has always had directly to do with the popular movements. For this reason, it is enough to remember the activity discharged in the time of Torres and the fear provoked by the fascist regiments, such as those of Banzer or García Meza. The last did not stop halfway but destroyed not only the union radio stations but also private stations such as was the case with Radio Fides in La Paz.[29]

[29] A key element in the strategy of the coup d'état of 17 July 1980, led by Luis García Meza, was to secure from the beginning, the absolute control of information through the silencing of the means of communication and establishing a single official channel. A report of the Permanent Assembly for Human Rights of Bolivia tells that on the day of the coup, "at 12:25 p.m. a group of paramilitaries, directed by 'Mosca' Monroy, who had been released from jail that morning, burst into the premises of Radio Fides, firing repeatedly (...) destroying tape recorders, transmission consoles, watches, typewriters, teletypes from Agence France Presse, and finally throwing a grenade in the record library" (APDHB c.1981). The report further says: "Radio San Gabriel. That same day, a group of armed people jumped the walls of the institution, took the radio, destroying part of its installations." The report emphasizes: "In the principal cities of the

As well as coming from the mining region of Bolivia and having been a witness of the unraveling of the miners' radio stations, you were in charge of Radio Vanguardia. Have you seen direct experience of the participation you describe?

Without a doubt. In 1963 and by invitation of the unions, I founded a radio station in Colquiri, which is the miners' center nearest to Oruro. The union in this centre already knew me. They had a building, they had bought the transmission equipment and gave me all the facilities to contract the necessary personnel and to name the station. It is called Radio Vanguardia and I directed it for three years, until the famous "May System" by which we were also destroyed.

As the person responsible for the station and with the obligation to be present for all the acts of the miners... In '65, to be precise, when Barrientos started to show his claws, Juan Lechín, the leader of the COB, was banished to Paraguay. The workers resolved to have a demonstration in Oruro. (Oruro is a miners' city. They go down from everywhere to the city to do their shopping or arrange official business.) There was the demonstration, which was to be peaceful. We went in a few trucks to Oruro, because Colquiri is ten or fifteen kilometers away. We couldn't enter and they detained us in the altiplano, in the pampa. Everything was closed by the soldiers. Then a delegation of workers went to talk with the military and I went with them, with a tape recorder. They talked with the colonel or the major so that they might let us pass. The military said no, that they were here to protect the city. Then I asked the colonel: "What would happen if the miners decided to enter?" "They are going to pay the consequences," said the colonel.

country, radios were equally taken over and entered the 'national network'... Only the miners' radios continued transmitting independently or formed their 'network for democracy'... Faced with the persistent military siege of the region, the three radios in the Catavi mining district—21 de Diciembre, Voz del Minero and Pío XII—decided to end their broadcasts on Wednesday the twenty-third at midday" (APDHB c.1981).

At that, the miners from Siglo XX arrived and broke the military circle. Suddenly there were heard shots on every side and someone shouted: "They're firing! Get to the trucks, *compañeros*!" Suddenly the bullets stopped and then I took advantage of that to collect some testimonies on the field of the battle. I saw that the miners without weapons, tried to resist but couldn't... Suddenly I saw that a miner was running who wanted to catch up with the trucks which were already going, but then a shot was heard and I saw this man fall. I went running with my little tape recorder ... I got close to the man. He was not dead but there was blood dripping from his mouth. I asked him: "What's your name?" "Juan Mamani," he answered. "Where are you from?" "From, from..."—and he fell dead.

This was a true tragedy. After we arrived at our mining centre and in the night I transmitted the testimonies. Because of that the military got here and searched for me like desperados. Then the *compañeros* hid me in the interior of a mine and I didn't leave there until that storm passed.

The Struggle for the Restitution of the Radio Stations

In your testimony, the history of miners' radio, at least in recent years, is a continual back-and-forth between appearing and disappearing, between years in which the stations are destroyed and closed and years in which they return to transmit...

That is the tragic history of Bolivia. A country tremendously hit by military dictators who do not allow the people progress in the construction of their democracy. But in spite of this, at no moment did the workers stop reclaiming their radio stations. There always existed this claim: among the demands of the workers is always the reopening of their stations.

Of course, as a result of the repeated falls that they have suffered, the miners' radio stations have not been able to totally recover. At this date, they are silenced. They have worked effectively and the result is that now there are personnel sufficiently trained—technically and politically—in order to channel a course in keeping with the interests of the working class.

In 1978, once the Banzer dictatorship was overturned, fifteen of the twenty-three radio stations were returned. At that time one could already speak of a certain level of awareness by the workers of the value of radio. It was no longer the "golden voices" that were required previously in order to make the radio an instrument of distraction, but men who came from the people, with a lot of talent and political commitment. Because of this, in '78 the radio stations began to work in the framework of the Democratic and Popular Union party (UDP), and they joined the important democratic process that the Bolivian people lived from 1978 to 1980, when again it was destroyed by the dictatorship of García Meza...

At this moment none of the miners' radio stations are functioning—nor either, of course, is Pío XII.

Chapter 3

Miners' Radio 1963–1983

Lupe Cajías[30]

The epoch of the boom in miners' radio can be placed between 1963 and 1983, with its ups and downs, which historically coincided with the brilliant moments of the independent and class-conscious workers' movement and with the fulfillment of the cultural conferences.

These meetings of the miners' leaders were the first of this type on the continent. Rough miners from inside the mine, drillers or experts in dynamite, sometimes illiterate, discussed the quality of the movies shown in the mining camps, the necessity that their children learn chess, the possibility of creating educational workshops on free art, the beauty of literary creation, the esthetic of popular songs, festivals of miners' poetry. These were busy times! The greatness of the miners' union movement was not only in its fighting spirit, its courage, its consequences: the miners of Bolivia were the defenders of the country, of its sovereignty, of the nation and the people who lived there. Many times the cultural projects were interrupted by military intervention. But there always remained its pedagogic memory and the dream to be carried out.

[30] Published in Alfonso Gumucio Dagron and Lupe Cajías, eds. 1989. *Las Radios Mineras de Bolivia*. La Paz: CIMCA–UNESCO. Translated by Alan O'Connor. Thanks [from Lupe Cajías] to *compañero* Líber Forti, advisor to the FSTMB from 1956 to 1985, for important information and access to documents from his personal archive. Without him this chapter could not have been reconstructed.

First Cultural Conference

From 1952, union radio stations were created in the principal nationalized mining camps. Apparently there exists no legal register of the radio stations, which were appearing. But recently Fátima López and Luisa Limachi, among others, have investigated the development of miners' radio for their respective university theses.

Neither in the few archives of the FSTMB are there any details on the foundation of each radio station. In a document published in 1963 with the reports of the First Cultural Conference of the FSTMB we find the following list of participating miners' radio stations:

- Radio 21 de Diciembre, in Catavi directed by Juan Carlos Camacho
- Radio Nacional de Huanuni, directed by Alfonso Rojas Moncayo
- Radio San José in San José, directed by Armando Morales
- Radio Colquiri in Colquiri, directed by Walter Marañón
- Radio 9 de Abril in Viloco, directed by Fernando Guachalla
- Radio Chorolque in Chorolque, directed by Carlos Michel[31]
- Radio Animas in Animas, directed by Justino Martínez
- Radio Huayna Potosí in Milluni (La Paz), directed by Waldo Vásquez Uría
- Radio Sumac Orcko in Potosí (Unified Company), directed by José Subieta.

In a report of the FSTMB dated in 1983, they speak of twenty-three radio stations in 1963; however, we do not have details of these stations.[32]

We do not know why the director of Radio La Voz del Minero was not present at the conference. The station was fully operational in 1963 in Siglo XX.

[31] Not to be confused with the private radio "Chorolque" of the Bernal de Tupiza brothers, or radio "Chorolque" of the railway workers.

[32] See appendix to this chapter for lists of stations.

The discussion and the outcomes of the First Cultural Conference allow us to see the influences of anarchism among the miners through the cultural advisor Líber Forti and from independent leaders such as Víctor López.

The meeting took place at a crucial moment for the Bolivian workers' movement, particularly the miners, in that 1963 was the year of the definitive break with the official MNR. This separation began in December 1956 with the economic measures of the Eder Plan, approved by President Hernán Siles.

The Federated Union of Miners, in spite of having MNR members among its principal leaders, starting with the leader Juan Lechín, was marking out the distance that separated it from the ideological and political project of the MNR.

In those years the presence of the Communist Party was notable, through leaders such as Federico Escóbar and Irineo Pimentel (later a member of the PRIN[33]), who won back the prestige lost by their party for its actions in 1946.

The Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR) would never again come to have leaders of the stature of César Lora or Isaac Camacho.

In December 1963 the internal discussions, the criticisms, and self-criticisms of the FSTMB came to conclude with the famous congress in Colquiri. Instead of the divisions fomented by the official party (MNR), unity was recovered and also total opposition to the government.

The conference in February was marked by this struggle and by the necessity to oppose the influence of Radio Pío XII.

The majority of the miners' radio stations in the north of Potosí had responded to the challenge of the Catholic station by contracting professional personnel from La Paz, with training as "showmen" but without commitment to the working class. Excellent speakers, but with no revolutionary militancy.

[33] [Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left, a left-wing group within the MNR—Trans.]

Furthermore, the presence and influence of the official party (MNR) in various unions, such as Huanuni, brought about the sponsorship of radio stations that were attached to the government and forgot the essence of their birth.

The Resolution No. 16 of the XV National Miners' Conference in La Paz in October 1962, faced with this situation recommended (among other things):

> To initiate in this way, through the cultivation of informative, cultural, and artistic activities, a stage of general raising of the levels of spiritual concerns of our *compañeros* in which will be set down an essential coordination of forces from which must be born the indestructible Solidarity of all miners in their march toward total emancipation. We intend that this program of activities will initiate:
>
> – literacy of workers and their families
>
> – conditioning of programs and good functioning of the miners' radio stations which then should form the national Network of Miners' Radio Stations, through which from time to time the Executive Committee of the FSTMB must keep bases throughout the country informed and oriented.
>
> [...]
>
> (It is recommended also to collaborate with the zealous periodicals of the base and with the weekly "Control Obrero," to form libraries, radio dramas, to form experimental miners' theater casts, as well as musical and folklore groups, cultural, and union training through publications, printing workshops, and schools of graphic arts).
>
> – a national press organ of the miners and a powerful national miners' radio station.[34]

This "Resolution No. 16" is cited in later years in various miners' congresses and in studies about the leaders themselves as the most important milestone in the cultural struggles of the underground workers.

To fulfil this resolution the First Cultural Conference was organized. The second point on the agenda was the theme of miners' radio with the participation of the secretaries of culture, the directors of the radio stations and the director

[34] Resolution No. 16 of the XV National Miners' Conference held in La Paz in October 1962.

general of radio communications, the secretary of radio workers, the technician from COMIBOL, Eduardo Arroyo, and others.

The fundamental objective of the union was to more effectively open another front of the workers' struggles: their culture.

Specifically on the theme of the radio stations it was proposed

> to obtain the organization of the network of miners' radio stations which will reach all parts of the country, in a regular and periodic form to encourage the struggle and hope of the miners' parent union and its affiliated unions, in order to securely arrive on this occasion at an agreement to put aside certain aspects which in the past have caused difficulties in having served more than one time to carry sectarian expressions which can in no circumstances be useful to the cause of the working class, because what is succeeding in the road to its emancipation will always be achieved together and exclusively thanks to Unity.[35]

In the second session of the Congress, the theme of miners' radio was discussed. Walter Camacho, secretary of culture of the FSTMB, presented this theme:

> Just as the sciences and arts were progressing in effective goals, advancing human evolution, there also was created and developed the reach and diffusion of that instrument of communication which is the spoken word. It has been in ratification of this established objective truth that the panorama of mining union activities emerged as a direct expression of the many needs and doubts of all kinds and, as a medium to communicate these expressions, the miners' radio whose existence today is unavoidable.[36]

Camacho asked to find solutions to the problems of miners' radio at that time: irregularities in wavelengths coming from national and international norms, deficient programming, low artistic and cultural level, sectarianism.

[35] Inaugural words of Secretary General Mario Torres, p. 6.

[36] Resolution No. 16 of the XV National Miners' Conference (see note 34).

Each of the directors reported on the situation of his station:

- Huanuni: sixteen radio workers, monthly expenses of 11,000,000 Bs, 7,000,000 Bs paid by the mine workers and 4,000,000 Bs from advertising.
- Colquiri: three months of functioning with regularity, economic movement of 400,000 Bs.
- 9 de Abril: directly administered by the workers without need of directors, the initial contributions of the workers came to 1,800,000 Bs, having a monthly deficit because of salaries for personnel. The debt reaches 16,000,000 Bs.
- Viloco: barely has 600,000 Bs and functions deficiently.
- Chorolque: has 300,000 Bs monthly from workers' contributions; all its work is cultural.
- Animas: has 1,050,000 Bs of which 900,000 Bs represents union contributions. The workers select the directors. Income from advertising is minimal. Four years of activity in the air. Transmissions from the theater.
- Milluni: will start to disseminate Radio Huayna Potosí, authorized in 1963. Workers contributed 80,000 Bs each and 240,000,000 Bs were collected. The radio station would start to function on the first of May from a modern building. Record library of nine thousand discs; it is proposed to carry out a wide cultural and union task, literacy education and make programs in Aymara and Quechua.
- 21 de Diciembre: does not receive help from the workers and is maintained by income from the radio station. Contracts technicians, announcers, and scriptwriters in La Paz. It is proposed to import transmission equipment of one kilowatt.

- Sumac Orcko: four years of life. Its commercial advertising reaches 2,000,000 Bs. The radio station was acquired with the contribution of 5,000 Bs from each worker and is administered by the workers themselves. It does not receive help from the company and takes the place of the shortage of newspapers in Potosí. It possesses two auditoriums, for a hundred people and for four hundred people.

The director of radio communications informed the Congress of a resolution in preparation in order that the radio stations obtain their licenses and legal frequencies on the appropriate band.

According to these reports the majority of the radio stations were born in the second part of the decade of the '50s.[37]

Hugo Sánchez, executive secretary of the Federation of Radio Workers, also participated, and he brought up the need to train mining personnel so that the workers themselves would carry the radio stations forward, as had happened in the first years.

This aspect was approved and put into effect.

Also, Resolution No. Six recommended the formation of a Consultative Cultural Council in charge of the national network of miners' radio stations, presided over by the secretary of culture.

One of the first tasks of this Council was to do a tour in all the mining districts where there might be radio stations in order to assist them, exchange ideas and programs, and coordinate broadcasts. This recommendation was carried out until 1965, and with the visits in charge of Líber Forti and a radio communication technician, mine leaders strengthened the radio stations.

With respect to the network, there already existed spontaneous broadcast links between various radio stations, as Forti and Murillo remember. But the network itself had its first appearance during the episode of the hostages at Catavi.

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[37] The report of Radio San José is absent, although it attended the meeting.

In December 1963, the FSTMB had to move its congress from Colquiri to Oruro because of the persecution ordered by President Victor Paz. At the end of the meeting which officially broke with the MNR and proposed the revolutionary and class-conscious struggle of the workers, Pimentel and Escobar were taken prisoners. The miners, when they were told of what happened, took as hostages North American diplomats who were in Catavi, along with some other functionaries.

The miners' stations, led by La Voz del Minero, exchanged reports and strategies about what to do with the hostages and the negotiations. The national newspapers and those international papers that came to cover the incidents were informed principally through this network.

For their part, the miners knew of the arrival of their leader Juan Lechín and the negotiators through the radio. All of the assembly was transmitted.

During 1964 and until the entrance of military troops in May and September of 1965, miners' radio was the best arm to put forward the miners' positions and to call for subversion.

The cultural conference bore fruit and succeeded in improving the programs, the participation of the workers in the running of the stations, the organization of festivals of folklore and poetry, and the Solidarity, Unity, and Consciousness so much demanded among the bases.

In that epoch was given, in addition, the unity of the radio workers with the miners. The Declaration of Principles of the Federation of Radio Broadcasters approved in January 1965 denoted the influence of the miners' cultural advice; they defended revolutionary unionism, the yearning for peace and happiness, anti-sectarian, and anti-dogmatic positions. Struggle for the liberation of the oppressed "through the permanent exercise of human solidarity and the nobility of shared sacrifice."

Walter Vivian and Liber Fortí were commissioned to carry out a tour of the network of radio stations. There exist partial reports of this tour. It was

recommended to form administration committees with the participation of the secretaries of culture (director), secretary of housing (administrator), the press secretary (reporting), and one delegate from each section in turn, as well as a representative of the radio personnel.

The tour ended before the intervention ordered by General René Barrientos.

In February 1966, the FSTMB initiated pressures in order to obtain the return and restitution of union buildings, radio stations, and libraries. The same request was made by the XIII Congress held in May of that year in Siete Suyos. Various of the union radio stations were silenced until 1970, and some disappeared forever, like Radio Exelsior of the construction workers, in whose defense Adrián Arce was killed.

On 23 June 1967, in the context of the guerrilla movement commanded by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the military government ordered another bloody intervention in the mines. Rosendo García Maissman, leader of Siglo XX, died machine-gunned after sounding the alarm siren of Radio La Voz del Minero.

In 1971, the workers of Pulacayo requested the donation from the FSTMB of a record player and reinitiated the work of the radio station.

In spite of the generalized repression, the radio stations of the principal districts functioned, resisting the government of General Hugo Banzer (1971–1978). A successful strike in January 1975 blocked their silencing. From December 1977 to January 1978, radio again played an essential role in the triumph of the hunger strike.

Second Cultural Conference

In May 1979 the V Congress of the Bolivian Trade Union Congress (COB) was held and a cultural plan was approved that was then reinforced by the miners, and the reorientation of miners' radio was proposed.

Among other points, the Cultural Plan of the COB was proposing to defend "associated tendencies in which, parting from the natural biological

actions of humans to survive, there is located in our old culture, against the dominant ideology which encourages competition and consumerism (antihuman and outrageous values)." To encourage the popular memory of those tendencies through initiatives such as folklore activities (held in the station auditoriums). To wake up the effective solidarity which brings unity; unity of criteria which results in unity of action, to praise the moral values of our old tendencies of mutual aid against egoist degradation of individualism; to pass from consumers of culture to become creators.

The plan emphasized the workers' participation in union journalism, the radio stations, folklore, the plastic arts, theater, puppetry, audiovisuals, Super 8 cinema, to create a union radio school and technical training.

The Second Miners' Cultural Conference took place in July 1979 and among other points proposed retaking the network of miners' radio, to produce miners' radio dramas and create a miners' television.

The main points in the groundwork of the emergency cultural plan approved in 1979 draw attention to:

> The presence of fascism in Bolivia, even more in its recent stage of the Banzer regime, does not respond only the desire for enrichment of the national and imperialist privileged groups, but also in a important degree, has a profoundly reactionary content, imposed with the educational media, news, television, commercialized art and physical force. This is a step backward in the level of human relations among all Bolivians, including, unfortunately, the workers (FSTMB 1983, 14).

The analysis showed the fascist efforts against the consciousness and drive of the workers, through persecution (repression), corruption and the television (alienation), which "invites and pushes uncontrolled consumerism of goods, with which in wakening the egoist part of the human being, there is a search to satisfy at any cost the tastes prefabricated by light-headed advertising. The capitalist poison of consumerism (...) the weed of competition and division" (FSTMB 1983, 14).

Because of this it was proposed:

> to take agreements, in a necessary and urgent form, on the base that, they are affecting the human relations of the *compañeros* of the base among themselves, with their leaders, and these together with the union leaders of the FSTMB, it is for us to be concerned with those levels of human relations. Actions must be projected with common objectives which in every mining collectivity will permit all of us to be interested in the awakening of feelings of sociability and communication, to praise the natural necessity to express ourselves through various artistic forms (...) forging in that way a class solidarity that will reach all the members of the family of the one and glorious FSTMB, bases and leaders (FSTMB 1983, 14).

The results of this conference were seen in practice: promoting the University of Siglo XX, contacts for the training of miner filmmakers in France (actually done years later), training of theater artists, and in radio drama. The inflow of this unified and combative consciousness was translated into the role played during the coups of November 1979 and July 1980, and the resistance to them that followed.

Not only the situation of the rise of the popular movement favored another boom in miners' radio, but also these ideas that were approved and in one form or another translated into reality.

Unity, solidarity, combativeness are the pillars of miners' unionism and expressed by the radio stations in spite of sectarianism, of internal struggles, of corruption which little by little infected the leaders.

Also, after the Second Cultural Conference of the miners, there was signed a "Cultural Agreement COMIBOL–FSTMB of social, cultural and educational action, sports, and social research" which proposed a series of initiatives in order to raise the spiritual life of the workers. Many of the proposals remained crippled because of the military coup of 1980, but were revived in 1983. With regard to the radio stations, various training workshops were designed, such as the electronics workshop for fourteen miners' children who could take charge of the maintenance of the miners' radio stations.

The plan proposed that the children of the workers be trained in management, programming, and announcing in order that the radio stations not lose their class reputation but improve in quality.

Third Cultural Conference

The Third Cultural Conference of the FSTMB took place from 24 to 26 January 1983 in La Paz, a few months after Bolivia recovered a democratic system of government.

The miners and their radio stations had again played a protagonist role in confronting the military until their humiliating exit from power on 10 October 1982.

The strike of November 1981, initiated in Huanuni and which would be the beginning of the end for the dictatorship, had among its objectives to recuperate the miners' radio stations destroyed in the assaults launched in 1980.

Point c) of the Convention signed with the government on 24 November 1981 dealt with the reopening of the radio stations. On 2 February 1982 negotiations were restarted and on the fifteenth a specific agreement was signed about the stations:

- thirteen radio stations remained legally authorized to function
- a commission of government–miners–Church will verify in each district the state and conditions of the transmitter, equipment, buildings, and materials of the radio stations
- inventories of all the equipment, materials, accessories
- recommend technical repairs in each case

After undertaking the tour, the commission came back to meet from 26 April to 6 May. The Minister of Transport suspended the closures and arranged for the return of confiscated equipment from the army in the II Division in Oruro and in the headquarters in Atocha and Siete Suyos.

COMIBOL would have to make feasible the repair, replacement, and return of the radio stations.

The commission recommended the immediate purchase, because of growing inflation, of spare parts and necessary equipment. The miners denounced that COMIBOL was obstructing these purchases and various radio stations did not get what they requested.

In the report "The Commission for Radios," the General Meeting of the FSTMB on 14 June 1982 said: "The radio station is not a luxury but a powerful arm of the proletariat, as a mechanism of social communication, which has the mission to orient, raise the level of culture, inform correctly and spread the spirit that will contribute to the coming to mass consciousness of all our people, undoubtedly with the vanguard of the mine workers."

The thirteen radio stations in condition to work were Cumbre, Chichas, Pío XII, La Voz del Cobre, Animas, La Voz del Minero del Sur, Sumac Orcko, San José, La Voz del Minero, Vanguardia, 21 de Diciembre, Nacional and Viloco.[38]

The ordinary congress of the miners was informed of the work done by the radio stations during the resistance, information that has been published outside the country and for this reason is not included here.[39]

Not only the workers of one locality had struggled for their radio station, but others from diverse mining camps. Thus the miners from Atoroma reported: "we offered fierce resistance to the entry of the army whose principal objective was to silence Radio Viloco and to force us to end our strike."

The congress of 1982 recommended retaking the initiative of a miners' radio network, to reactivate the paperwork for the stations of Matilde and Milluni and win the complete repossession of the other stations.

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[38] In this negotiation Radio Pío XII was accepted as a miners' radio station.

[39] See the Bolivian Permanent Assembly for Human Rights "La heróica resistencia de los mineros de Bolivia" (APDHB c.1981) and Gumucio Dagron (1982b) "Las radios mineras" CIMCA.

The Third Cultural Conference took the proposals of the congress and expanded them. This meeting took place twenty years after the first conference and the famous Cultural Resolution No. 16 of 1962 was republished as a guide to the struggle on the cultural front.

"Twenty years during which the contingencies of the evolution of our people registered long and dark passages, heavy with humiliation, prisons, tortures, assassinations, massacres, exiles, everything condensed in death, its threat or its memory, which constitute anti-culture, the negation of life."

This paragraph from the report of the Third Conference concluded by expressing the necessity to work for a culture that vitalizes, for unity and for the culture of liberation.

At the inauguration of the meeting the secretary general of the FSTMB Víctor López said: "Our union movement constitutes in all the camps, and for all the men, women and children the possibility to develop a person more in solidarity, more human and free. That is, apart from alienation, the society of consumption, ignorance, crime and the brutalization of man by work."

López repeated that miners' unionism was the only thing that would overturn "anxieties and worries in the field of culture and its production." The topic of miners' radio was presented by Roberto Arenas, member of the Commission of Culture and by Pastor Alcócer, who had been president of this commission.

The conference again asked for the restitution of the radio stations destroyed by the military, a request that appeared in successive miners' general meetings and congresses.

In the end, the conference participants recommended to all the miners to continue together with the struggle for bread, the struggle for culture, because the two signify the liberation of the person and the search for social justice.

> Through all the means of human expression, which make us feel less victims and poor, but closer to the joy of living, it is this and not the other which is the height and aim of culture.

> Because it is the embers of these calls of militant fervor which light up all those of us who participate in this conference, maintain alive the slender humanity of fraternal feelings, united for the desire of a culture which in front of the destiny of misery, suffering and uncertainty, we roundly and decidedly affirm struggling as *compañeros* for a social dawn for our children, which perhaps we ourselves will not come to see.

According to the principles of the Third Conference and in spite of the growing sectarianism, miners' radio would come to play an important protagonist role in the coming months.

The confrontation with the democratic government of the Democratic and Popular Union (UDP) began from the first months of 1983 and the miners' radio stations emerged as pilot stations in what were called the "networks of union and popular radio stations" which functioned in the center of prolonged general strikes or, in the case of the "Days of March," when fourteen thousand miners arrived in La Paz to reclaim their rights.

In August 1985 with the dictating of Supreme Decree 21060 "relocalizing"—that is, dismissing—thousands of miners from their sources of work, there began the exodus of the workers. The camps were left empty and the radio stations without audiences. Some were given to the campesinos, as with Radio Matilde, after a dispute between those who were leaving and those who stood by the mine. Who should keep the station?

The new attack against the radio stations was not with a red massacre, army boots and machine guns. The "relocation" of the miners has effected this even harder against miners' radio of Bolivia.

Appendix to Chapter 3

In the Agreement signed with the government on 6 May 1982 the following list of radios is given: Cumbre from Tazna; Chichas from Siete Suyos; La Voz del Cobre from Corocoro; La Voz del Minero del Sur from Telamayu.

Of those already named, Radio Colquiri changed its name to Radio Vanguardia.

As well as those radios, in another report the FSTMB in 1980 gives the radios: Miraflores in Siglo XX, Bolivar in Bolivar; and in May of 1983 as well as those already listed there figure Radio Libertad from Santa Fe, Radio Machacamarca from Machacamarca, Radio Telamayu from Telamayu, to which later was added Radio Matilde from Matilde. Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (1983) gives others without dating their foundation: Radio Japo from Japo, Radio Kami from Kami, Radio Potosí from Potosí, Radio Quechisla from Quechisla, Radio Santa Ana from Santa Ana, Radio Llallagua from Llallagua (municipal radio). In 1979 there was created Radio Uncía in Uncía (also a municipal radio).

Chapter 4

The Political Role of Miners' Radio

Alfonso Gumucio Dagron[40]

On 17 July 1980, it darkened at midday in the city of La Paz. Just a few minutes after noon there rang out bursts of machine guns right in the centre of the city, on the avenue known as El Prado. The yellow building, three stories high, of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), where the Executive Secretary of the Bolivian trade union congress (COB) also operated, was attacked by paramilitaries who arrived surreptitiously in ambulances marked National Fund for Social Security. Paradoxically and tragically, the ambulances opened fire on the FSTMB offices. Paramilitaries surrounded the building, entered it to take all the occupants prisoners, coldly assassinated Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, Carlos Flores, and Gualberto Vega, and took away in one fell swoop almost all the main leaders of union organizations and of leftist politics.

That was the initial military operation in which an attempt was made to neutralize any popular response to the coup. In the hours that followed, groups of soldiers and paramilitaries tackled three more objectives, considered of vital importance: two of those were communication media. The Government Palace was violently assaulted and the full ministerial cabinet taken away. Then the paramilitaries completed the first phase of the plan with the assault and destruction of Radio Fides and the weekly political paper *Aquí*. In the two months

[40] Gumucio (1982a), published in *Comunicación y Cultura* [Mexico] 8: 89–99. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

before the coup d'état, the paper had become the most effective means of social communication, to the extent that its director and founder, the priest Luis Espinal, was kidnapped, tortured, and riddled with bullets in March 1980, in the middle of the pre-electoral period.

In this way, the coup of General García Meza and Colonel Arce Gómez ("Arcesino" after the assassination of Luis Espinal) consolidated itself in La Paz that seventeenth of July. The general strike the COB called was not able to maintain itself for long. It was losing strength when the Executive Secretary of the Federated Union, a prisoner in the Estado Major, decided to lift it, before it extinguished itself. The roadblocks were less effective than during the aborted coup of November 1979.

The cities under control, the campesinos detached from the guidance of the workers...the coup triumphed militarily. Nonetheless, an exceptional situation, unknown to many, was unfolding at that moment: resistance continued in the mines. The mining workers, even without their leaders, took on the responsibility of confronting the military coup.

In this setting, miners' radio played a very important role, to the point that only when the last of the stations was silenced could it be considered that the popular resistance had come to a halt and that the workers had opted to retreat. But that didn't happen until two weeks after the coup! Until then, the radios in the mines were the factor that held the workers together, and their influence made itself known through the campesino zones near to the mining centers and in the cities, where day by day the population followed the happenings through the union radio stations.

One of the first measures of those involved in the coup, as well as destroying Radio Fides and silencing Radio San Gabriel, was to intervene in all radio stations and newspapers. The control over information media was total from the first day. The stations in La Paz could return to the air only under the most extreme censorship. None of them could broadcast news. Only Radio Illimani, the

state radio, could broadcast information, and all the others were obliged to establish a network with it.

In the mines, meanwhile, throughout the first weeks of the coup and while the military forces tried to enter sowing fire and blood, the miners' radio stations continued transmitting news that contradicted the official information. It was as if it were a different country. While the torrent of official words tried to impose the image of a country that was placidly accepting the imposed coup and ignored the popular will, from the mines there surged voices expressing what all Bolivians were thinking at that moment. Voices that also desperately tried to organize the popular bases to resist the military, a resistance that came from all the Bolivian people together.

The radio network of the mines was reduced bit by bit, as the mining population fell into the hands of the army—some as a result of extraordinary killings such as took place in Caracoles, whose heroic resistance will always be remembered by the Bolivian people. One by one, the miners' radio stations disappeared from the airwaves. But as soon as one fell, another took its place, keeping the network alive.

The tape recording that is transcribed here is an example from which we can draw interesting conclusions. We must take into account that it is only one hour of transmission captured from the city of La Paz in the first days of the military coup. We have not had the option to choose from other recordings, but this one seems to us to be sufficient as an example.

Three radio stations participate here: Radio Nacional in Huanuni, Radio Animas and Radio Pío XII. The three operate in different mining centres and far from each other. In the present case, Radio Animas has an important role because it is threatened by an incursion from the army. Radio Nacional establishes a network with it and with other stations in order to let people know what happens. At a certain moment, Radio Pío XII manages to establish contact with Radio Animas and join up with the network.

The recording is very defective at certain moments and for this reason the text is fragmentary. So too, sometimes is the discourse of the announcers. It is clear that in a dramatic situation like this the broadcasters at Radio Animas cannot spend a lot of time on the inflection of their voices. The dots in the transcription indicate inaudible words, phrases, and sometimes paragraphs. On the recording there is also evidence of attempts, apparently by the army, to interfere with the broadcasts. At certain moments one can hear a voice saying, "One, two, three, four, Radio Nacional in Huanuni..." [counting in Spanish and English]—in any light, lacking in imagination.

Recordings of Miners' Radio in July 1980

Radio Animas:

(...) some fourteen workers, we repeat, fourteen *compañero* workers. We also inform that yesterday the armed forces of the Loa Regiment slowly started to enter this district, crossing Siete Suyos. Their objective is to take Radio Animas. But thanks to the decisive action of the housewives and children, until now the entrance of the military has been blocked (...) This action of the armed forces was neutralized... later, in the afternoon, another contingent arrived from Tupiza in another action much more decisive, they wanted to enter, but encountered the same barrier of the housewives... then the army on the condition of our silence, moved to the locality of Chocaya, where they are encamped...There were other actions simultaneously with approximately thirty trucks in Telamayu. Then, this situation continues...(...) the decision to neutralize this radio station, to behead the union organizations, for this reason we are now ready to defend ourselves, because evidently the armed forces are now surrounding all of the sector of Chocaya, all the sector of Chocaya... There is a total mobilization of all the *compañero* workers of Santa Ana, Siete Suyos, Animas, and we are also reporting that mobilization has started in Tacna, Rosario and Buen Retiro, in Chorolque, in Quechisla, in San Vincente. Approximately two thousand campesinos have

arrived from the Sud Lipez zone... With this report we paint you a panorama which is distressing at this moment, *compañeros* of Radio Nacional de Huanuni...go ahead, Radio Nacional from Huanuni...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

Thanks, *compañeros* from Radio Animas, may you continue defending the objectives of the working class and struggling in defense of the democratic process... we sincerely congratulate you from here... The present situation of the Central South Council is tremendously worrying, in the district of Huanuni...those reports that you are giving are also being heard by workers in other mining districts... *compañeros*, we would like you to tell us exactly where are the army troops... go ahead, *compañeros* at Radio Animas...

Radio Animas:

The troops would be approximately five kilometers from Siete Suyos and very close to Santa Ana... so we are hurrying to defend ourselves... The number of detainees has reached thirty-one, who have been brought to the city of Tupiza according to the information that has arrived at our pressroom...This is Radio Animas, for all the south of the country... We are in this crucial hour, we are in constant mobilization, the women have also helped enormously with the preparation of every implement that we could use to defend ourselves... we are here to the ultimate consequences, *compañeros*, because this is our mission, to defend ourselves... we have not insulted anybody, in no way, we have not provoked this situation... Brother who is listening to us, son of mine worker, of campesino, of factory worker, brother who doesn't have a high military rank, you are aware that the people of Bolivia are your own brother. It is for this that we call on you not to open fire on your own brothers, against your own fathers...This should now be the order from aware soldiers, who should together lower their guns... (...) the service for the so-called nationalism that lamentably brings this country, year after year, to sink more and more... Therefore for us this is the

opportune moment to defend ourselves, because the order that has instituted itself right now is feeling resistance in Cochabamba, in La Paz, in Oruro, in Tupiza, in Uyuni. The campesinos of the north, we know that they are practically rejecting with their blockade, they are going ahead with a plan which evidently could be feasible... the country needs a democratic respite, *compañeros*... Go ahead, Huanuni...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

Exactly, *compañeros* from Radio Animas,... (...) across the breath and length of the national territory, every home...(...) with respect to this situation, the general stoppage in all the country and at the same time the blocking of the roads...(...) and also has a great strengthening in all the country... and this is a reality that we could reflect on, *compañeros*,... In the same way we want to use these moments to bring in our point B, our mobile point B, in order to pick up Radio 21 de Diciembre, we are sure that there in Siglo XX they are receiving these reports and consequently we are going to make a wide and open network... We want to tell you that the *compañeros* of this district are extremely worried ... Coming up to direct some words of solidarity to you is the *compañero* Secretary General of the Combined Union of Mine Workers of Huanuni, and then the Secretary of Conflicts of our union... Attention, Radio Animas, this is Nacional in Huanuni and this is the voice of the Secretary General of the Combined Union of Mine Workers of Huanuni...

(Voice of the union leader:) *Compañeros* of the Central South Council, *compañero* campesinos, *compañero* factory workers, *compañero* school and university students, builders, *compañero* miners... (...) the cause is liberty, the democracy which should exist in this country... (the rest of the discourse and the next are inaudible).

Radio Animas:

Exactly, we are going to try to link up with Radio Chichas in Siete Suyos which in a few moments will give us information, because the armed forces would be getting close to Siete Suyos, then in whatever moment we will have news... Before going ahead with other reports, we are going to give the microphone to a *compañera* campesina who has been with us since yesterday...

(Voice of campesina:) *Compañero* miners... (discourse in Quechua)...

(Announcer:) Here is another *compañero* campesino worker from the Nor Lípez sector addressing the national miners' network, go ahead, *compañero*...

(Voice of campesino first in Quechua and then in Spanish:) *Compañeros*, brother Bolivians, the campesinos of the province of Nor Lípez, through an assembly held, we direct to the mine workers, factory workers, campesinos of all parts of the country the following voted resolution... Seeing that the country has been again toppled by the deceitful fascist military, we want our popular vote to be respected, the democracy that the people longs for so much in order to live democratically and have a constitutional president... we make known the following... First, to support the *compañero* miners in all of Bolivia and hence the working class of the country... Second, the prompt release of the compãneros imprisoned in the city of La Paz... Third, to defend alongside the *compañero* miners of the Central South Council, the powerful radio station (...) of the proletariat of the country which is the Animas radio station, through it we have mobilized something like two thousand campesinos...(...)...

(Announcer:) Many thanks, *compañero*, as you heard, listeners, therefore there is a general consensus in this part of the country, in order to defend ourselves in front of the military attack... We want to again demonstrate to the *compañeros* at the different barricades, to maintain calm until the final moments... to maintain this situation because only when provoked, we will not be responsible for any other situation...We understand that the compãneros of Chorolque, San Vicente, Tacna, Rosario and Buen Retiro are already on the road

in order to defend this radio station, to defend principally the *compañeros* and to join in their struggle...In this way, in the meantime, do not make any provocation, we suggest to keep calm, while of course we continue from Radio Animas... over to you...

Radio Pío XII:

Compañeros at Radio Animas, this is Pío XII calling Radio Animas, to our listeners in the Central South Council... Please tell Radio Animas that Radio Pío XII wants to contact Radio Animas... This is Pío XII from Siglo XX, calling to Radio Animas of the Central South Council... We repeat our call... *Compañeros* of Radio Animas, we are in contact with you and in whatever moment, when you decide, we will be in contact with you... This is Radio Pio XII...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

The Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB) gives the following instructions... At any moment our miners radio stations could be silenced, but the Bolivian people and especially the mining workers must continue the indefinite general strike until... (...) to obtain the democratization of our people...Go ahead, Radio Animas...

Radio Animas:

Here the distressing situation continues among the mining workers...also we would like to know any information, official or unofficial, about the fate of the *compañero* leaders of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), the glorious trade union congress (COB), if you have any special information please go ahead...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

Perfectly, *compañeros* at Radio Animas, we would like to tell you the following... According to the latest information gathered in the city of La Paz, there would be three *compañeros* of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of

Bolivia (FSTMB) who have fallen... Among those are the *compañero* Simón Reyes, a situation that has not been officially confirmed, but according to unofficial reports and especially foreign radio stations, it is being said that Simón Reyes has been killed... Also we want to tell you that there are a hundred prisoners in the city of La Paz... There have been bloody struggles in the main streets and in the popular barrios... Radio Fides remains completely dismantled... We also want to tell you that because of a bomb dropped from a plane of the Air Force that the transmitter of Radio Vanguardia in Colquiri is completely destroyed, there is nothing on the air from them anymore... Getting back to the city of La Paz, we want to tell you that information from the city of La Paz has been completely cut off, but people of goodwill and the *compañeros* of the resistance are informing the mining radio stations that the resistance continues in the city of La Paz, the same as in the valley... Numerous campesinos—thousands of them—but also factory workers and university students have mobilized in La Paz in order to resist the military coup... About what has happened to the workers' leader, the *compañero* Juan Lechín Oquendo, we want to inform you that he is a prisoner and has been taken to an unknown place...(...) It is official, *compañeros*, the death of *compañero* Vega, of the mining district of Catavi and leader of the miners' Federated Union... We repeat the name, Gualberto Vega... has died as a result of the occupation by the paramilitary of the central office of the highest organization of the workers, the Bolivian trade union congress (COB) and the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB)...In this understanding *compañeros* of Catavi and Siglo XX are organizing a symbolic vigil and have issued numerous statements repudiating these acts of vandalism that the military have been causing in the city of La Paz...(...) *Compañeros* at Radio Animas, these are the reports ...

Radio Animas:

Evidently the news is not attractive in that our *compañero* leaders have been captured in the city of La Paz, according to what we have heard... Turning to other things, here the mobilization of the *compañero* workers to resist whatever attempt by the military to enter the mining districts... We have been listening to a variety of information coming from outside the country and this is the moment in which we are going to make a call to fraternal Latin American countries in order that they can join in the defense of the workers and people of Bolivia, because in this way we will still be demonstrating the public will expressed in the elections of 29 June... We need a free country and for this reason we are hurrying to defend ourselves against the military assault...

Radio Chichas:

Information has been received in this mining centre that the military troops who had been camped in the railway station of Chacoya are already mobilizing... In this sense the workers of the district are peacefully waiting for this incursion but still in a state of alert trying to safeguard especially the mining camp... In this sense the workers have left for places outside the camp in order to try to dialogue in the first place, so the workers have said that they are not leaving to confront the brother soldiers in this difficult moment for the country...Certainly they will receive instructions from union leaders and will try to dialogue with the officials of the army and hopefully reach a general understanding...

[Musical break.]

Radio Animas:

... Attention, the latest information, shooting has practically started in the heights in Santa Ana, forces should be grouped in this sector to counteract the situation of the incursion of the military in the mining districts. Firing has started in the sector of Santa Ana... that information was gathered a few moments ago...

Radio Pío XII:

... Attention, *compañeros* of Radio Animas, this is Pío XII in Siglo XX calling Radio Animas, we are tuning in to you...

Radio Animas:

... at the heights of Santa Ana, first mining camp, at the entrance to the Chocaya sector, the first armed encounter is taking place... Attention, over to you, Radio Nacional in Huanuni...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

Compañeros at Radio Animas, we greatly regret what is happening in the south of the country, meanwhile we go on in continuous network with you there... go ahead with the news...

Radio Animas:

Perfectly, Radio Nacional in Huanuni... We are also suggesting if you could tune in with Pio XII... In a few moments we will have in our studio a link with Pío XII, we understand that they are calling us... The struggle has started in the Chocaya sector and the *compãneros* in Tacna, Rosario, Buen Retiro are already on the road, also the *compañeros* in Choroloque, San Vicente, all these on their way to defend the sector of Chocaya... over to you...

Radio Nacional de Huanuni:

Exactly, colleagues at Radio Animas, we are trying to tune the mining radio stations into one big network , Radio Pío XII, Radio 21 de Diciembre and Radio La Voz del Minero in Llallagua... Also we are tuning in to the broadcasts of Radio Corocoro, Radio Viloco, and Radio Vanguardia...

Radio Pío XII:

... This is very important for the workers of the district and the population in general... In these moments they are calling for a general assembly in the

Miners' Plaza... The *compañero* workers should attend in a disciplined way at this general assembly of the five most important unions of this mining district... We repeat, at this instant the siren of the Siglo XX union is calling a general assembly in the Miners' Plaza, workers who belong to the five most important organizations of the district should attend in a disciplined way...

Radio Animas:

Pío XII in Siglo XX, Pío XII in Siglo XX,... through an internal line we can establish contact... go ahead with this understanding...

Radio Pío XII:

Perfectly *compañeros* from Radio Animas, we have been calling for some moments in order to obtain information on the most recent happenings in the mining sector... This is Pío XII in Siglo XX calling to Radio Animas...

Radio Animas:

The first clash of forces has already been verified in Santa Ana in the heights... In Santa Ana at this time they are fighting, the *compañero* miners are preventing the entry of the reactionary forces... Attention, go ahead with this understanding... (...) We are waiting for more news... It is possible that when Santa Ana is taken over we will lose contact with Santa Ana and Siete Suyos, therefore we are only waiting for more news...

Radio Pío XII:

Compañeros at Radio Animas, we want to inform you that all of the workers of this mining district of Siglo XX, Catavi, lessees, grazers [*lameros*] and all the general population is following very carefully the events in the Central South Council, and at this moment the five most important unions have called a general assembly in order to consider these and other aspects... Over to you...

Radio Animas:

Perfectly, working *compañeros*, here a housewife is going to speak to make known how she sees our situation...

(Voice of housewife:) *Compañeros*, *compañera* housewives, students, children, brothers... I ask you in this situation to assist us, *compañeros*, because we are not lambs for the army... we have brought them up so that later they will come to butcher us like lambs... because we are defending what belongs to us, *compañeros*... I am the mother of a family and wife of a miner, *compañeros*... this is what the *compañeras* of Chorolque, Tacna, Buen Retiro ask of you...

(Announcer:) You can all take note of the situation in which we find ourselves, *compañeros*...

Radio Pío XII:

We have taken note of a hundred percent of the information that you are transmitting through the network of miners' radio stations... We want to tell you that a regular worker of the mining company of Catavi is going to speak to you... In this sense we are going to hear the words of *compañero* Alejandro Enriquez...

(Voice of the miner:) *Compañero* workers of Animas, *compañeros* of Siete Suyos,... It is not very necessary to repeat my name, you already know me... I want to say to you at this urgent moment in which an unjust provocation places you... you have carried this problem few times, you know how many times in this sector we have suffered it and personally he who is speaking... How many times we have been (...) in this encampment and this company by fascist hordes... But we want to suggest to you with this experience: keep calm, *compañeros*, don't despair, there is no need to escape, there is no need to disband, the union makes us strong... We are confronted by a grotesque force, the force of the right, of animals! (...) With the force of unity, we are going to resist... It does not matter that (...) with fire, but we are not going to enter to work... It is not important that blood is shed (...) in La Paz, of the *compañero* leaders of the

Federated Union of Mine Workers, but we will not enter to work... We are only going to enter when our highest organizations tell us to... In this sector also we are attacked on all sides... Watch out for disinformation, watch out for guns... This morning you have had to listen in the news that we have had a clash in Miraflores, that there has been an injury... Since 1971 this is the second time in which you have seen such an attack, but this time you must have a more or less strong awareness, arm yourselves with courage, unity, *compañeros*, and above all loyalty to our struggle (...) Even when under the spewing fire of fascism, we are not going to enter to work...

(Announcer:) Those were the words of a worker, Alejandro Enriquez...

Chapter 5
Radio Nacional in 1985

Fernando Lozada Saldías[41]

Before describing the current functioning of this radio station, it is necessary to understand that for several years the district of Huanuni has been the only company of the nationalized mines not to show a loss. The number of regular workers is approximately twenty-three hundred, a number just over that employed in 1952. The total population of the district fluctuates between thirty and thirty-five thousand persons. Also, it is interesting to note that from 1980 there have been changes in the social and political order. In 1984 for the first time a list made up of a conservative tendency arose to the union leadership. For our interviewees this fact is explained by the relative economic bonanza, social mobility to the cities, which makes possible the installation of workers from other places, and also the crisis and atomization of the parties that traditionally were present in the union leadership.

Organization

As in all the other radio stations, the organization of Radio Nacional is determined by the circumstances prevailing in the union structure. Even so, it is not taken for granted here that the director of the station should be the secretary of culture of the union (almost always a teacher), as happens in other stations. This

[41] From an unpublished manuscript by Fernando Lozada Saldías. 1985. "Autogestión comunicacional en el sindicalismo minero Boliviano: Radio 'Nacional' de Huanuni." La Paz. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

position is occupied by whoever is elected in a meeting of the Directive of the union with delegates from each sector. In that case, it could be a teacher, an administrative worker, or even a radio announcer contracted in from the cities. Also, there is another administrative body made up of three workers elected in General Assembly who are exclusively in charge of administering the resources that come from the workers and are used for salaries, technical needs, and production materials. The Administrative Committee does not have input in programming and the communicative line of the station.

Among the basic principles according to which the station functions, the Director General and administrative staff (such as those responsible for Artistic Direction and the News Department) structure the programming, generally within the annual supervision which comes from the union.

In our visit to Radio Nacional de Huanuni, we verified that the tasks of management are in the hands of the Artistic Director and head of News, because of the absence of the Director General, who has not fully assumed his functions. Jaime Pomarayme, a radio broadcaster native to the district, carries out many functions and is the person best authorized to respond to our requests for information.

Material Resources

Radio Nacional continues to broadcast on shortwave. According to Nery Loayza, the first transmitter was more powerful. The installed capacity of the present equipment is 2,500 watts, and its effective output is 2,000 watts.

The building, of one story, has a transmission booth, a press room for three people, three offices (Reception, Artistic Direction, and Director General), a small recording studio, an auditorium for some two hundred people, and several outhouses. Because of the successive military interruptions, the archive of documents and programs is incomplete. There is no printing press, nor are there news services via teletype. The record library holds about a thousand discs.

Until 1985, says Pomarayme, the monthly support to the station was some 8 million pesos (about US$70). In the light of what is demanded from this amount, recently there was decided in General Assembly the individual support of a *mita* (a day of work), which would bring up the support to 120 million pesos (about US$960). This increase will not be sufficient to cover all the necessities, according to our informant. It will already be absorbed by immediate priorities such as salary increases, spare parts for the equipment, and other instruments of work and production material. Given the sharp crisis and inflation, this assistance does not permit the expansion of personnel nor important technical improvements.

Human Resources

The personnel of Radio Nacional is made up of twelve workers distributed in the following way:

Table 1. Personnel of Radio Nacional

Personnel	Regular	Temporary
Directors	2	
Administration	1	
Technical Services (operators, recording technicians, maintenance)	4	
News and Production	5	2
Total	12	2

The number of regular workers at the station has diminished from that of the years 1960 and 1967, when it had more than sixteen workers.

Programming

Until 1980, the daily broadcasts were eighteen hours. Today the number of hours has been reduced to fourteen. Structured programming coexists with emergency networks in the present Bolivian democratic framework.

The schedule in force has been elaborated since the end of 1984 and is more than 90 per cent achieved. On the basis of the programming schedule envisioned for ordinary days (Monday to Friday) and on the basis of listening to various programs and from notes from the Artistic Director, one can extract the following table.

Table 2. Types of Content on Weekdays on Radio Nacional

Types of Content	Minutes	Percentage
Cultural	101	12.0
Unpaid announcements	45	5.3
Education and development	206	24.5
News	200	23.8
Opinion	29	3.4
Entertainment	240	28.5
Credits	16	1.9
Advertising	5	0.6
Total	842	100.0

On Saturdays and Sundays, the programming has a higher percentage of music. There are programs from the auditorium, children's and artistic shows, and programs produced by sectors of the district and by youth groups. Also, sports programs are transmitted, basically for local or inter-district tournaments. Programs produced outside the station are also inserted—though with popular themes—such as those produced by the Center for the Promotion of Miners

(CEPROMIN), as well as others from outside the country such as those distributed by the BBC from London.

Sources of News and Production

For the construction of the following tables, a weekly calculation has been made, and on the basis of this an average percentage. In relation to news, "own production" refers to the direct coverage and production by the station itself. The columns called "via" indicate the form or medium that directly or indirectly supplied the information to the radio station.

Table 3. Sources of Information for News on Radio Nacional

Type of news	Source	Medium supplying information	Percentage (within type)
National	Own	News Dept.	15%
	External (national)	Union and educational radio stations (Fides, San Rafael)	85%
Local	Own	News Dept. and local population	90%
	External (national)	Radio stations and national newspapers	10%
International	External (national)	Above media, alternative services, national publications	70%
	External (international)	International radio stations and alternative services	30%

Data from Saldías (1985).

Table 4. Origin of Production of Programs on Radio Nacional

	Own	External (national)	External (international)	Total
Programs of music and entertainment	12.5%	75%	12.5%	100%
Educational and development programs	61.5%	22.5%	16%	100%
Opinion programs	100%			100%
Cultural programs	80%		20%	100%

Music

With reference to music, 45 per cent is national, some 30 per cent Latin American—generally folklore or "social" music—and the remainder is "variety music" that comes from South America and to a lesser extent from Central American countries.

Participation and Access

Within the schedule for ordinary days, the radio station does not have structured programs for the direct participation of listeners. On weekends there are some, whether produced by social sectors or through live transmissions of social, cultural, or political events. These spaces (three hours a week) represent only 3 per cent of the total weekly broadcast time.

If the participation by the public in "normal" programs does not amount to the levels reached in moments of resistance and emergency, we must introduce another concept of participation in the media: that the message is part of the concrete reality of the listener. Because of this, we do not try to hide this visible incongruity.

There exist other forms and ways of participation as well as that which the listener can make with the media and the collectivity: the participation of listeners and radio workers in the direction of the station or in the evaluation of programs and the general action of the medium.

With reference to the orientation and the development of the "line" of the station, the workers of Huanuni have used existing democratic mechanisms in the union to express themselves about the direction of the radio station and its contents. Among these levels of discussion and decision are the General Assembly, and other occasions such as sectoral assemblies, and meeting of the base—whose delegates are present in the highest levels of decision-making. There are also national meetings and gatherings.

The social ownership of the station, established in an ideological patrimonial and cultural identification of the miners, determines participation—basically in terms of the preservation and continuity of the station. In spite of their condition as owners-listeners, the mine workers have not come to constitute—either in Radio Nacional or in the other radio stations—an instance which permits them input (specific and continual) in the direct production of the programs on the radio stations, except in moments of dramatic confrontation.

Thus, the orientation of the station is framed within the limits imposed by the logic and conception that privileges in radio the classic role of defender of the interest of this class sector.

For their part, the workers at the radio station do not have any formal mechanism of participation in the outline of the station's line. Still, the frequent absence of the designated Director General means that one of the most competent radio workers functions—from the Artistic Direction of the head of News—as the virtual director, almost always establishing a system of work in which the other workers have a certain capacity to decide about the development of the contents of the programs. The incompetence of the leaders and authorities designated by the union as in charge of the radio station is in this way compensated for by the

intervention of its workers, who, without a determined status to do it, have in reality the ability to exercise their criteria and training in the production and final broadcast of the contents.

About participation in the mechanism of evaluation of the action of the radio station, we should note that in the case of the workers, it continues to be limited as indicated above. The global evaluation fits as part of the financial evaluation at the end of each mandate. Also the workers can channel criticism of the contents or administration of the station, but always within the mechanisms and the channels established by union praxis.

Generally, the radio employees, within their work guided by self-taught or intuitive information, end up being those who do more—based on their experience—with the dimensions and the possibilities of the medium. Their contribution is inscribed in the everyday practice and is for this reason fundamental, even though formally they have been deprived of their participatory rights.

Chapter 6

Chronicle of a Miners' Radio Station: Sumac Orcko in Potosí

Dulfredo Retamoso L.[42]

In the endeavor of finding a definition of miners' radio, I venture to propose two approaches. The first: we are dealing with a form of expression whose goal is to deal with political oppression and, fundamentally, with social injustice. The second: it is a group of people of good faith and protected by the miners' union who combine their efforts and commit themselves to the demands of the mining workers, channeling the diffusion of their aspirations.

From the technical point of view, miners' radio stations consist of assemblies of handmade equipment, with signals that reach no more than fifty kilometers, although their reach is national in exceptional cases such as Radio Nacional de Huanuni, La Voz del Minero, and Radio Pío XII in Siglo XX. The last is not a miners' radio station properly said, because it belongs to the Church. But its presence in one of the most important mining localities in the country and its identification with the interests of the workers means that it deserves to be considered together with the other stations. The history of Radio Pío XII has already been told and documented, and for this reason we will not add more information about it in this text.

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[42] Published in Alfonso Gumucio Dagron and Lupe Cajías, eds. 1989. *Las Radios Mineras de Bolivia*. La Paz: CIMCA–UNESCO. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

Radio Sumac Orcko was one of the twenty-four miners' radio stations and belonged to the union at the Unified Mining Company with its office in the city of Potosí. The fact of having its installations in the city made it different from those stations located in the mining camps themselves, such as, for example, those in Quechisla, Milluni, or Corocoro. Radio Sumac Orcko did not limit its broadcasts to the mining world but also spoke to the city as a spokesperson and representative of the popular sectors of the city, as an alternative to the manipulation of information and the messages coming from commercial radio stations. An ideological confrontation was necessary with Radio Liberación and the Network of Informative Services of the Prefecture, both official, but the first more controlled by the Political Command of the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR).

The epoch when Radio Sumac Orcko had most influence dates from that brilliant and genuine miners' strike of 1954. At that moment, the station gave testimony, motivated, and spread the thoughts of the workers' movement that was confronting the MNR. With respect to the first hunger strike in Potosí it became a transcendental thing and attracted national and international attention. I want to express here my homage to those anonymous heroes and to those who still continue in the struggle of union leadership. During this historical event, the station carried out its broadcasts with all its human and technical potential in a challenge whose objective was to transmit the details and effects of the strike.

The name of the radio station came, according to memories, in a natural way and without much discussion. Its meaning is not foreign but rather identified with Potosí and expresses, in the native language, pride in Mother Earth [*cerro madre*]. Translated from the Quechua language, Sumac Orcko means "great hill." The subtlety of the native language permits another translation with a more rhetorical tint: "magnificent youth." I am asked if Radio Sumac Orcko was young. In some ways, it was young, as a project of an independent radio station under the control of a politicized union. And old, as a project that succeeded in including in

the team of director and personnel, people with experience at other radio stations. Because of this perhaps, one could expect little difference in its structure.

If we remember who forged the radio station, we must highlight its best-known director, don José Subieta, an old journalist, who had impressed his style as announcer at Radio Potosí. His characteristics included especially his inimitable timbre of voice, appropriate to a leader and orator in the plaza, with excellent diction and a dramatic emotional register. The voice of "Motete" Subieta was clearly recognized, especially in transmissions of demonstrations and civic and school marches. The reading of news gained personality thanks to his presence. Subieta was accustomed to start the program with a flourish including chords from a military march. The first part would be a block of national news, generally extracted from the newspapers from La Paz or from monitoring national radio stations. He would also highlight some important event in the international panorama.

It was usual in the reading of news to use a little bell or a marimba to separate each news item or block. The central part of the news program was the editorial and the commentaries of opinion, in which there was open criticism of local or national politics. This exercise of freedom of expression could only be achieved with the aid of the union that owned the station, because it was difficult in that epoch for the military to intervene or the government to impose sanctions. This was different from the situation of the commercial radio stations, which preferred self-censorship.

The commentaries with expressive forms notable for the permanent use of irony, sarcasm, jokes, etc., depended on the way in which they were read. They were generally written by Subieta himself, assisted by a team of journalists from the "old school." No longer counting on the interesting newspaper *Alas* (of notable influence before and after the Chaco War), these journalists found in the station a space for the exercise of free expression. In that team of collaborators, we remember Luis Alfonso Fernández, Roberto Leyton, Isaac Flores Ponce,

"Piantadino" Cárdenas, and others who used pseudonyms to slightly deflect the police persecution, although it was easy to identify them by their style. These collaborators were grouped in the Association of Journalists of Potosí, which also broadcast the weekly oral magazine *Ecos*, almost with the same characteristics and read by Subieta himself.

Those of us who started off in these fights barely came to develop other and less important works. It is good to recognize the zeal pledged by those old journalists in ethics, the social responsibility that they assumed, the overwhelming position of political and ideological commitment. Our experience in miners' broadcasting, which has its origins in the Potosí and Oruro radio stations, is a product of a brave vocation driven by Armando Gutiérrez Daza who was the first Director of Radio Nacional de Huanuni and later of his own station, Radio Potosí. To him is due a series of innovations: technical and in programming and production. Naming him in this moment is a just homage and an opportunity to emphasize his contribution to Bolivian broadcasting. There have been several radio broadcasters to whom we owe much, at least for their friendship.

I remember when taking over the Artistic Direction—that is what the head of programming was called at Radio Sumac Orcko—the outstanding part was the main news program. With the aim of supporting the rest of the daily programming and competing with the other commercial radio stations, we accepted with dignity this difficult task, because we well understood the secrets of commercial radio and the technical conditions under which we worked. These challenges included having to restrain ourselves ideologically and deal with technical limitations. In those circumstances, we sharpened our ingenuity and tried to insert ourselves among the other radio stations.

We rescued in Radio Sumac Orcko the use of the auditorium, maintaining live programs, promoting artists in music, poetry, and humor, and having live shows of various kinds where the radio station broadcast from the auditorium. The people preferred and enjoyed public participation. In this way, in miners'

radio there emerged recognized artists, for example Los Brillantes and Luzmila Carpio; among humorists there was Malaquito Hayrajata and Panchito Sosa, who in their innovations began to sing about contemporary events and Mexican songs in Quechua.

Later my radio persona Pedrito Kentacacharis was timidly born on the miners' airwaves, to become a local success on Radio Electra in the city of Potosí. It is necessary to emphasize that the auditorium and the live programs constituted the most characteristic facet, since they had the virtue of being the seed for presenters and animators who have not been surpassed to this day and continue in different radio stations throughout the country. Other types of formats used, and with success, were radio dramas, but for the local units they substituted Mexican and Argentinean episodes with all their disadvantages. (About the local radio drama unit, it would be important to carry out research.) Later the social drama initiated by Radio Pío XII was introduced as a motivating element for literacy education by radio. That form also started to be used in Radio Sumac Orcko to form social cadres connected to the life of the miner.

The direct transmission of assemblies or from the official podium (*balco*) of the great public demonstrations—union and civic—certainly constituted what was most outstanding in the radio station. There would not have been a public act that was not transmitted, and it was a form of spreading and transmitting sympathy for the miners' movement, although it generated a difficulty, which was to lower participation among workers and the people in general (who preferred to stay home and enjoy the broadcast). The emphasis of these broadcasts permitted the spread of ideas and provoked the presence of the miners or the citizens at these gatherings.

The "musical postcard" was born with the characteristics of miners' radio, but it was nurtured in commercial radio and became, at least at Radio Sumac Orcko, another of the most listened-to features. Every fifteen minutes, three pieces of music, generally having national or Mexican themes, were broadcast

along with a dedication to a family member of friend. After every piece the names of the people were repeated. The cost, more or less the equivalent of a dollar, constituted a direct and real support to the economy of the station. Also, credit was offered to the workers, who afterwards paid with payroll deductions. The hours were adapted more for the demand than for the programming plan, so that many times there were night broadcasts to satisfy the users and owners of the station, who were miners themselves. Legislation prohibiting this type of personal service was at the time one more reason for the closure of the stations.

More drawbacks than advantages of this type of program could be remembered. Among the first, the repetition of musical themes during the day produced a saturation and reduced the numbers of listeners. The increase of this personal service, which did not have a wide effect on the community, diminished the importance of the social service. The positive part—in addition to the economic success—was having strengthened the diffusion of national recordings. Very close to this mode of the "musical postcard" was the service of bereavement notices: with the lack of written media to publish death notices, the radio station carried out this task. Every hour at least three minutes were dedicated to the complete reading of notices about religious services, deaths, and anniversaries of deaths. The names of the deceased were read along with those of all of the grieving family, an exigency imposed by the undertakers. This mode also guaranteed an important economic income, because for reading of the same notice some ten times a day there was a charge equivalent to two dollars. This generally guaranteed an amount that paid the wages of the announcers.

In the matter of the use of scripts, we can say there was little custom and need to make them. Only the fixed programs required them. The sustaining programs were entrusted to the improvisational capacity of the announcers of that shift, including the reading of advertisements (before the appearance of "jingles"). But it is good to emphasize that each program counted upon an outline and was helped with news derived from books, magazines, and other published materials.

When a script was used, the format was more classic: one part for the technician at the controls and another part for the announcer. In general, commentaries were written for political, romantic, historical, or civic themes, etc. These were read accompanied by a musical theme, along with advertisements. These schemes are still used in broadcasting throughout the nation.

The Quechua language was introduced as part of programs with poetic content more than as a natural means of communication. In this aspect I believe I was one of the promoters, with the help of a worker-miner-rentier (*rentista*) named Pío Viñola, who fed me with verses, phrases, prophecies, tongue-twisters, and other forms, producing programs to stimulate and honor the native language.

The "miners' networks" appeared for the urgent necessity of coordinating union actions: strikes, stoppages, or marches. For national coordination, the principal radio stations in Huanuni, Siglo XX, and others raised the signals of the next stations, sometimes through a "duplex" with other intermediate stations. For example, Radio Sumac Orcko raised the signals of Quechisla and those were retaken by Radio San José as far as Huanuni. This system permitted an interesting realignment, in which one could control the workers' movement and its effects in an immediate way. In this way miners' radio broadcasting fulfilled one of its aims when it constituted itself into a political instrument of the workers' movement.

This act, peculiar to Bolivia, supported demonstrations and more concrete actions, so that in the list of workers' demands—after wages and always in second place—they asked for the return of the functioning of their radio station. This shows that radio is embodied in the necessities of life of the miners and that they recognize its effectiveness as a medium of expression of their freedom of speech.

Politicized or not, it is and will be an instrument that joins together, motivates, or integrates. The participation of radio in the political history of Bolivia since 1947 is still a theme that deserves to be studied. Happily, the protagonists are still among us today.

Chapter 7

Radio Matilde: A Very Short Life

Luisa Limachi[43]

Radio Matilde worked in the mining district of the same name, for a year and four months, with musical and educational programming. But it was silenced by decision of an assembly of mine workers, in the middle of May 1986, which decided to give the radio to the campesinos of Chaguaya after the massive retirement of workers because of the effect of Decree 21060. It is necessary to know what the installation of the radio meant to the workers and the circumstances in which the miners' camp has been left in order to understand the short life of Radio Matilde.

Background

Radio Matilde emerged through the initiative of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), which in 1983 through the Commission of Culture proposed the installation of a network of miners' radio stations to respond to the informational attack by private and government media on the workers' copartnership. It was also to achieve the conscious and active participation of the workers at the base in the activities of the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (COMIBOL) and the highest miners' union organization.

The network of radio stations would come from three geographical points: north, central, and south. For the north, the Matilde mine was taken into account

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[43] Published in Alfonso Gumucio Dagron and Lupe Cajías, eds. 1989. *Las Radios Mineras de Bolivia*. La Paz: CIMCA–UNESCO. Translation by Alan O'Connor.

for its proximity to Peru and to La Paz, and also for the wide spectrum of campesinos surrounding it. This district is 175 kilometers from La Paz, in the province of Camacho and on the banks of Lake Titicaca.

The then leader of the FSTMB, Guillermo Dalence, and workers from Matilde developed the project for Radio Matilde for medium wave and shortwave. In August 1983, the proposal was presented to an organization for international solidarity, which in the end did not give its support.

While awaiting international aid to install Radio Matilde, the FSTMB received the donation of twelve FM transmitters from Christian Aid (1984) and one of these was given to the Matilde union, which already had started acquiring records for the station with the assistance of the workers.

Only five transmitters were installed in the miners' districts, which already had radio equipment. The rest were used in an exchange with a foreign technician who had assisted in their installation.

Edgar Ramírez, leader of the FSTMB, indicated that they planned the installation of a permanent network of miners' radio stations on the basis of the transmission strength of three miners' stations of 50 kilowatts each.

But this network was not put into place because of the lack of economic aid, and only Radio Matilde was installed on FM. With the aim of establishing a nexus with the bases, the FSTMB succeeded at the end of 1985 and part of '86 in producing a radio program of one hour, which was called "Miners' Federation on the Air" and was transmitted by Radio San José toward other districts. Because of many problems its transmission was suspended. The commission of culture, made up of Cirilo Jimenez, David García, Santiago Salazar, Edgar Ramírez, Guillermo Dalence, José Pimentel, and Justo Pérez was in charge of the production of the program.

Going On Air

From February 1985, Radio Matilde went on air, with musical programs. In January the installation of the transmission studio was completed, with

professional record players, a tape recorder, and a console. From the first of May of the same year it started working regularly. According to the testimony of a former base worker, Sebastían Quispe, an assembly that took place at the end of 1984 named the members of the administration committee of Radio Matilde, along with other radio workers.

Quispe tells that in the beginning the FM transmitter was installed in a rudimentary way with a three-in-one apparatus loaned by the worker Daniel Tudela, and for six months it operated in this way. Later Radio Matilde would be equipped thanks to the cooperation of international solidarity organizations.

The programming in the first months was musical and greetings to workers. There was also the reading of communications from the FSTMB and the union.

Then programming was developed that envisioned spaces in Aymara, music, union notices, and children's programs, kitchen recipes, and traditional medicine. For the news program a network would be established with Radio Panamericana.

This programming lasted throughout the station's lifetime, and *compañero* miners, teachers, and housewives participated in its production and development. Although there was a great limitation because not everyone had FM on their radio receivers, the commentaries were positive on the radio programs.

Clandestine

Perhaps one could consider Radio Matilde to be a clandestine station because it did not have the required license from the Communications Commission (DGC) for its transmissions. According to what Sebastían Quispe indicates, this authorization was not obtained because they expected to equip the station with frequencies including shortwave. For this reason an application was not submitted for FM.

Support

The support of the six hundred workers of the district permitted the payment of minimum salaries to the announcers and at times to the operators. The workers' support did not cover administration expenses.

At the same time, although the transmission equipment covered a circle of some twenty-five kilometers, some workers in other districts say that the transmissions of Radio Matilde were heard in Oruro, in Huanuni, and even in Puno and Juliaca (Peru).

Crisis in Matilde

Because of the crisis of the COMIBOL, produced by the fall in the price of tin and other minerals such as zinc on the international market, and the decision of the government of Dr. Víctor Paz Estenssoro to restructure the corporation, various miners' districts practically entered a period of food shortages provoked by the non-supply of provisions to the company stores (*pulperías*).

The government was not interested in the recuperation of the largest mining company. More important was its economic model that recommended reducing expenditure in the state companies, to avoid economic losses.

This situation generated a climate of desperation in the bosom of the mining workers of Matilde, which was sharpened by the lack of clarity of the union presided over by Fernando Vásquez. An assembly held on 13 April 1986 determined to propose to the government a massive retirement.

They asked also for an extralegal bonus for retirement, or else maintaining of the company operations, and the timely supply of company stores and medicines.

Thus on 24 April it was known that COMIBOL was analyzing the plan but in no way would accept the workers' conditions.

At that decisive assembly the FSTMB delegated leaders Edgar Ramírez and Guillermo Dalence to analyze and explain in depth the economic measures of

the government and the position of the highest workers' organization, which then proposed no retirement and the defense of sources of work.

According to the testimony of Edgar Ramírez, the assembly was heated, and many speakers came to insult Guillermo Dalence, who fought tenaciously to persuade his *compañeros* to avoid massive closures that would lead nowhere.

Because of the positions encountered and the decision of the bases that they did not understand the arguments, the assembly opted for the massive retirement. In subsequent negotiations, the committee that negotiated better benefits also obtained an extra-legal bonus of 600 Bs.

While this was happening in Matilde, the workers of Huanuni, also in assembly, decided to raise production in order to defend their sources of work.

Last Resort

As a last resort, at the XXI National Miners' Congress, held in Oruro, the miners' housewives, advised of a serious danger to their families, proposed the struggle for the defense of their husbands' sources of work, and the congress itself resolved to oppose the closure of the mines.

In spite of this determination, the decision of the workers of Matilde was carried forward, to the desperation of the housewives and little children who cried when, on 4 June of this difficult year, the Minister of Mines and the executor of the weakening of COMIBOL, Jaime Villalobos, officiated at the closing of the Matilde mine, and the 526 miners received their severance and social benefits.

It all happened at the speed of light. Many workers in the end wanted to stay, but COMIBOL had transport at the gate, and in little time the camp was left practically empty.

In the period during which the miners were negotiating better social benefits for their retirement, Radio Matilde remained at a standstill, that is to say it did not broadcast its programming and little by little it was silenced.

Then a final assembly in which the majority of the workers participated, in the absence of the leaders of the FSTMB and on the suggestion of Sebastián

Quispe, resolved to give all the equipment and accessories (microphones, console, recorders, records, and other implements) of Radio Matilde to the campesinos of the area.

It was Sebastián Quispe who informed the campesinos that the station should not leave the district and insisted that it should stay here to be administered by the campesinos.

Although initially there was opposition from the union's General Secretary, Fernando Vásquez, pressure from the campesinos was applied and in the presence of two thousand agricultural workers the equipment was definitively handed over.

It is worth mentioning that in this decision the miners' Federated Union was not consulted. They only knew about it much later when the mine workers were retired.

Thus ended the life of a miners' radio station, which, although it operated only on FM, was beginning to shape itself to become an important station, given its geographical location.

From Mining to Campesino Radio

Afterwards, Radio Matilde, now in the hands of the campesinos of Chaguaya, continued broadcasting in a sporadic way with different programming than that of the miners, mostly with musical programs but with different characteristics. Now it is not miners' radio, now it is campesinos' radio.

It is known that the campesino sector, because of their lower economic income, cannot contribute to the maintenance of the station, and it is evident that it confronts technical and economic difficulties that prevent the regular working of Radio Matilde.

The workers who had helped in mounting the station have also left the district, and the management of the equipment is exclusively in the hands of the campesinos.

The Latest

After the massive retirement of the miners in the Matilde mine, there remained a small group of workers made up of some sixty miners and teachers. The workers began to dismantle the equipment in the interior of the mine, although they were disposed to stay put. The circumstances obliged them to dig their own graves, with the dismantling of the equipment, the most modern that the company had, and the last possibility is ending that the Matilde mine might continue as a source of work.

In a final attempt to survive, this reduced group of workers (among whom is Guillermo Dalence) participated in the "March for Life and Peace," which took place at the end of August 1986, demanding concrete attention to the problems of mining. In this march participated women, children, and men who did not want a "white massacre."

The group from the Matilde mine left from Achacachi and was the only group that arrived at La Paz, after dodging around the military patrol, while ten thousand marching miners and other workers were dispersed by a military encirclement in Calamarca on 29 August.

It was all useless. The march remained truncated and the group of workers from Matilde had to remain clandestine. Thanks to the cooperation of nuns and priests they were able to stay for two days, waiting for instructions from the highest union organization, which had ordered a retreat.

The return had the taste of defeat, more for the workers from Matilde than for the others, and at the end of November of 1986 the last group of miners were retired, although then fourteen miners formed a cooperative for farming and other activities. In order to use the land of the former company of the Matilda mine, they had to fight with COMIBOL. The encampment remains empty, and today the housing is deteriorating and has been converted into housing for the soldiers of the Bolivian Army.

The FSTMB

The general secretary of the FSTMB, Edgar Ramírez, in referring to what happened in the mining district of Matilde and its repercussions for the life of the radio station, has said,

> The decision of the workers was wrong. Although they worked in a coordinated way in the installation of the station, when finishing work in Matilde, they did the contrary, the most irrational that could be done. That is to say, they have destroyed the radio station, and in reality it does not exist because it was donated to the campesinos of the area.

The creation of Radio Matilde was the fruit of the struggles of its workers. The closure of the station has been the result of their frustrations.

The leader Ramírez adds that in this manner it is confirmed that the life of the miners' radio stations is intimately related to the life of the union. "If there is no union, there is no radio." And that is what happened in the case of Radio Matilde, which had a short life on the FM dial of the mining workers.

On the other hand, if the Matilde mine had losses in its production, these could have been solved, reducing the costs and making technical changes. But the miners did not listen to this.

At present there is a rise in the prices of tin and also of zinc, a mineral which was produced at Matilde with a modern system which is now dismantled and with no possibility of being reinstalled.

Radio Matilde, in its short life, had intended to win an important campesino audience with its programs in Aymara.

In a beautiful region such as that of the Matilde mine, which sheltered more than five hundred workers, the voice of the miners is no longer heard. They have left for other regions of Bolivia, and Radio Matilde remains in the hands of the campesinos.

Chapter 8

Bolivia: Miners' Radio is Dying

Raquel Salinas[44]

A Little History

Miners' union radio in Bolivia is dying. Of the twenty-four radio stations that the miners had in the 1960s, today there remain only sixteen. With lapsed licenses, rusted equipment, and hungry workers, of those sixteen today only five operate... at half engine. If they die, with them will die forty-two years of history and heroism, a unique case of autonomous union radio broadcasting.

In all of Latin America, Bolivia is the only country in which the unions have long experience in the ownership and development of radio stations. Bolivian intellectuals debate their origins and the exact date of the first experience, but recent research suggests that they started as early as 1946, a little after the creation of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB, founded in 1944), when miners decided to have their own radio stations.

For the miners, 1946 is a key year. It was the year of the Extraordinary Congress of Pulacayo, which generated what are today called the "Theses of Pulacayo." This congress approved a class thesis—the first in the history of the Bolivian miners—to create a single congress and form a mining bloc in order to participate in the elections of 1947 with its own candidates. Its bloc won two

[44] Published in 1988 in *Chasqui* [Quito] 27: 46–49. Translation by Alan O'Connor from the original manuscript.

senators and six deputies. In this way, in the third year after forming its Federated Union, the miners already had their own parliamentarians.

The details are not very precise, but between 1947 and 1949 inserts appeared in the daily newspapers *La Razón* and *El Diario*, owned by the Aramayo and Patiño families—two of the three "tin barons"—demanding the closure of the clandestine station La Voz del Minero. According to the inserts, the radio station was functioning in a tunnel in Siglo XX, the largest mine in Bolivia, and caused continual incidents with its calls to subversion. In order to finance it, the FSTMB had charged dues to its members.[45]

The army bombarded La Voz del Minero in 1949 but its short life taught the miners the value of their own media. In these years the miners tried many ways to make their situation and their political positions known. Those were years of massacres, protests, and occupation of mines, and no media listened to the miners. Even the Association of Journalists was against them. The dailies called them "criminals and savages." In order to counter these campaigns, the miners invited ministers, parliamentarians, journalists, and academics to the mines. Some understood, but many did not change. And the miners gathered force to install new stations.

The revolution of 1952 helped and the miners' radio stations flowered. Many unions wanted to have their own station. Almost all were financed by dues from their membership. With deductions from their payroll, each miner donated one day of work for the station. A few others had different forms of financing, like Radio San José in Oruro, which bought its equipment with the sale of thousands of empty bags and cans accumulated in the company stores, according the story of don Armondo Morales, an old miner who was president of the union at the San José mining company at that time.

[45] Lupe Cajías, "El Papel de las Radios Mineras en el Sexenio 1946–1952." Paper presented at the symposium Realidad y Futuro de las Radio Emisoras Mineras de Bolivia, organized by the Centro de Integración de Medios de Comunicación Alternativa (CIMCA) and UNESCO, Potosí, Bolivia, 9–11 November 1988. Published as (Cajías 1989a).

The form of administering them also varied. Many were the responsibility of the secretary of culture of the union owning them; others were administered by special committees. Whatever the case, the legal regimen was always a problem for all of the miners' stations. Although the MNR encouraged union radio broadcasting, it never legislated in order to recognize their status. Even today, the miners' stations are forced to register as commercial stations...or function as clandestine stations.

Miners' radio was always an instrument of social class. Referring to Radio San José, don Armando Morales says that on 21 December 1957, in inaugurating the announcer's booth and pressroom, in a symbolic act the oldest worker in the mines presented the keys. He was community leader René Pareja, who emotionally thanked union organizers in these words: "Thanks, *compañeros*, with this weapon much more powerful than rifles and canons, we will defend our source of work."[46]

Radio San José was carrying out its first experimental transmissions on shortwave two months earlier, with the name "Radio Rebelión, the Voice of the Workers of Oruro." Shortly afterwards it obtained its license as a cultural radio station and defined its objectives: intransigent defense of the interests of the miners, political and party independence, defense of the unity of the working class through the FSTMB and the trade union congress (COB), raising consciousness about voluntary retirement and the free hiring imposed by the political economy of the epoch, and the united struggle to prevent the closure of the mine. The station also worked for its objectives, so that in less than a month the government decided to prohibit its transmissions and cancel its license. According to what one minister said, the miners had tricked him in applying for a license as a cultural station but functioned with political aims.

[46] Presentation and interview with don Armando Morales on "Radio San José: La Voz con Coraje Minero," Realidad y Futuro de las Radios Mineras en Bolivia (see footnote 45). Published as (Morales 1989).

But the union of San José did not close down its radio station and challenged the government to try to close it by force. Various studies in recent years have collected innumerable testimonies of bloody struggles, of taking of buildings, of bullets and dynamiting to silence the stations, on the part of the government of the day, and, on the part of the miners, of struggles to defend them with their lives.

These are the radio stations that today are dying. There are forty-two years of their struggles, a unique case of union broadcasting that is completely autonomous that will die inevitably if international solidarity does not arrive to help. Quickly.

The Mining Sector in Crisis

The miners, who always were the vanguard of the workers' movement of Bolivia, today are much pounded. The fall of the price of tin on the world market and the neoliberal politics and privatization imposed by the government of Victor Paz Estenssoro have them on the ground. The closure of the mines, the reduction in wages, and the loss of gains in the workplace have been the daily bread of the miners in the last three years. And, of course, the "relocalized" dismissed miners who today wander in villages, cities, and the jungle, trying to colonize parcels of land in climates to which they are completely unaccustomed. The toll is tragic: there are only seventy-three hundred miners left; another thirty thousand have been dismissed.

According to a leader of the FSTMB, the central theme of the last miners' congress (which started 14 November 1988 as these lines are being written) should be the organic question: today one cannot justify forty-five union leaders for only seventy-three hundred members. Indeed the FSTMB must reorganize itself completely. In the forty-four years of life of the Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia, never before has a theme like this been addressed.

Neither have the miners' radio stations ever suffered so much misery. They live from the payday of the miners. With thirty thousand miners dismissed,

the dues have greatly fallen and those who remain are so impoverished that they can no longer assist even with one day's pay. Of the eighty-four unions affiliated to the FSTMB, today only sixteen still have their own radio station. And of these sixteen stations only two function regularly, another three operate sometimes, and the remainder had to end their transmissions for the lack of all kinds of resources.

Radio San José is one of the two that still regularly functions. To succeed in this, it had to cover finances with advertising. Today it continues to function in Oruro, but even though the union is the owner, it no longer has control over its station. Radio Nacional in Huanuni also continues functioning regularly. According to its director, Alberto Murillo, Radio Nacional receives each month 2,120 Bs from the members of its union. With this sum (equal to US$880) it pays wages to the eighteen employees, maintenance, and operating expenses.[47] Radio Nacional is the most "solvent" of the miners' stations. The remainder appear more like Radio Animas, in whose union there remain only 180 members, who contribute US$150 a month. Radio Ánimas still functions a few hours a day: it is not dead but, like all the others, it is dying.

The state of the installations of the miners' radio stations is pathetic. A recent investigation says that of fourteen stations, only five have transmitters in good condition. The state of the rest varies between bad and worse. The five stations with good transmitters do not operate as they should because the deterioration of the cables and the poor state of the antennas cause their transmissions to be defective. All the stations need repairs or new consoles, record players, microphones, etc. Their buildings are so deteriorated that their state worsens the poor functioning and rapid wear and tear of the equipment.[48]

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[47] Alfredo Murillo, paper presented at Huanuni, 25 October 1988. Published as (Murillo 1989).

[48] Dagoberta Trincado, "La infrastructura de las radios mineras." Annex to the presentation of Victor Baldivieso, FSTMB. Realidad y Futuro de las Radio Emisoras Mineras de Bolivia (see footnote 45).

The Debt

To finish off, the sixteen radio stations that remain carry a debt of US$100,000 for licenses and use of frequencies. And since the government has decided to liquidate the mining sector, it has made sure that the Director General of Telecommunications (DGT) insistently collect this debt.

Victor Baldivieso, the Secretary of Radio Broadcasting for the FSTMB, declares that there are eight stations with licenses expired since 1985—the miners reduced their support in 1986, the year of the beaten "March for Life," when the massive layoffs started. Another nine stations have the status of "clandestine" because they never had a license. Since November of last year, the DGT is cornering all of them with the charges for licenses and uses of frequencies. It is demanding that the "clandestine" radio stations constitute themselves as companies and comply with all of the requirements, including an initial deposit of 10 per cent of declared capital... For this they have been given time until 31 January 1989. That is only two months. It will be another blow from the government to the miners. A true "white massacre"—this time of miners' radio.

The solution is not easy, because many factors conspire against it. The crisis of the miners is so great that the leaders of the FSTMB have not succeeded in developing a plan to save the radio stations. They have many problems on their hands and all are urgent. Neither are the unions used to coordinating their actions when it comes to radio. The stations have always been autonomous, even from the FSTMB itself. The Federated Union is thinking of zoning the radio stations and struggling to conserve a few: Radio Animas for the South, Radio Nacional de Huanuni for the centre, and Radio Milluni for the north of Bolivia. But the union members have always been proud of their radio stations and everyone wants to save their station, even though the union itself is dying. Today the FSTMB knows that if it wants to rationalize its precarious resources, it will have to convince the

affected unions, something it has not done. The existence of political tendencies within the unions does not facilitate an agreement on a unified rescue plan.[49]

Neither has the COB managed to resolve the problem. In the Congress in Santa Cruz it approved a one-time payment by all members of 1 B (US$0.40) but the resolution has not yet been carried out. The COB formed a committee charged with seeking assistance from outside the country, but many people have commented that this is only a long-term solution. Meanwhile the deadline of the DGT—31 January—hangs like a sword over the heads of the dying radio stations.

After much negotiation, the FSTMB and the Union of Trade Union Radios of Bolivia (which included factory radio stations and others that belong to unions) succeeded in getting the DGT to reduce its demands. A short while ago, the DGT agreed to forgive part of the debt for three years of non-payments. This reduced the debt from US$100,000 to US$64,000, an amount that is equally unpayable for the miners. Even so, the situation is not lost: the DGT also agreed that if the miners pay only 5 per cent of this debt, they can negotiate the remaining US$60,800.

"Pay Up or Close"

The key problem is to gather this US$3,200 before 31 January. If the miners pay this amount, they will have time in which the unions and the new leaders of the FSTMB can develop a unified plan. That plan implies choosing which radio stations they want to save, because everyone knows that they cannot maintain sixteen stations for seventy-three hundred workers. It will be sad, there will be tensions between leaders and union members, but there is no other solution. Just as one can see that the FSTMB is obliged to reduce the number of leaders, also the unions must reduce the number of stations if they want to

[49] Presentation and interview with don Victor Baldivieso, Secretary of Radio Broadcasting of the FSTMB, at the symposium Realidad y Futuro de las Radios Mineras en Bolivia (see footnote 45).

maintain their own voice in Bolivia. This would permit them also, automatically, to reduce the total of the debt.

Alfredo Murillo, the director of Radio Nacional de Huanuni, wrote a short time ago that "the miners' radio stations have been studied, they have been researched for a university thesis or to spout about popular and alternative communication, but they have not been helped." This hard criticism has some truth. In a seminar held in Potosí, between the ninth and eleventh of last November, various Bolivian intellectuals analyzed diverse aspects of the history and current situation of miners' radio. Some came, as well, to gather information for their university thesis. And none of them, not even the organizing institution, brought any proposal to save the stations. Perhaps the miners' broadcasters suspected this, because none of them attended the seminar.

The meeting, nonetheless, was not only academic. Chasquihuasi Communications from Chile struck a note of realism that helped the assembly to think in more concrete terms. Through the representative of the FSTMB it offered the first US$500 to pay the 5 per cent that must be paid before 31 January. That same night, the Union of Press Workers of La Paz offered to hold a *peña* to collect funds and other institutions began to offer concrete ideas: form a solidarity committee with the Bolivian stations, organize a campaign to gather moral and financial help in Bolivia and in the rest of the world.

Meanwhile, time continued to run out. If the radio stations do not pay this 5 per cent (US$3,200), in February of next year, the story will be over because the licenses which today are expired will be declared "reverted," in other words, all the stations will be declared clandestine. And with 80 per cent of its force decimated and "relocated," the miners will have to wait many years to regain their own space in Bolivian radio broadcasting.

Open Conclusion

Alfonso Gumucio Dagron[50]

The more I learn about participatory communication for social change and read about grassroots experiences that tell the story of people organizing to make their own voices heard, the more I value the experience of Bolivian miners' radio. And the more I feel proud to be Bolivian and to have been associated with those radio stations as an active supporter, providing them training and writing about them since the mid-1970s.

What makes Bolivian miners' radio unique compared with other community media experiences in the world? It is not only the fact that the radio stations were the first established, or the enormous influence they had in the Bolivian struggle for democracy and freedom. The main difference from most of the other examples I know is that they were not the product of a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a development project. They were born out of the sovereign will of mine workers, who possibly didn't realize—particularly during the 1950s and 1960s—how important those stations were to become over the years.

For the past twenty years we've been talking about participatory communication, "access" to media by the people, horizontal and dialogical flows of information, alternative communication, radical communication, indigenous communication. These are times when everyone seems to be in favor of

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independence and freedom of expression. Most of the valuable examples we have today, though, are the result of initiatives taken by progressive individuals working with NGOs, international aid programs, or even government institutions. In other words, "projects" that we help to set up because we believe the initiative will ultimately remain in the hands of the community. If I look back at my recent work *Making Waves* (2000), I have to acknowledge that near all of the fifty case stories included in the book, with the notable exception of the Bolivian miners' radio station, are to some degree the result of external institutional inputs.

The uniqueness of the Bolivian experience with community radio is even more astounding if we consider some of its main longstanding features:

- The miners' radio stations started developing during the late 1940s, at a time when participatory communication was nonexistent.
- They grew as an impressive network of more than twenty-five stations in only fifteen years, covering the most important economic territory in the country.
- The miners themselves funded the stations with part of their wages and assumed full ownership.
- Presenters and programmers were drawn from the local community, and some became so experienced that they ended up working in major Bolivian networks years later.
- Women and children from the community often acted as human shields to defend the stations against attacks from the army.
- The stations largely transcended "local" limits and in times of political crisis had national influence.

How many participatory communication "best practices"—to use the language of development organizations—can match the above qualities? Can we list other examples of community media that lasted thirty years without continual external support? Do we know about other grassroots communication experiences that have been influential at a national level? In terms of financial sustainability, how many community radio stations in the world are funded through collective ownership?

For all the above, it is somehow galling to realize that the world is acknowledging the miners' radio stations only by the time they have largely declined. For many years I have criticized the attitude of communication researchers in North America, mainly the United States, who do not make the effort of reading what is produced in Spanish or Portuguese in Latin America. A clear signal of this is the absence of references to Latin American communication research in the books they publish and in the papers that they present at international conferences.

Even when the research topics relate specifically to the Latin American experience, such as community media or rural radio, or to broader issues, such as communication for development and social change, that have been particularly important in our region, the scarcity of references to our thinking is appalling. Only those scholars whose works have been translated or who have taken the challenge of writing some of their works in English (such as in my own case) are treated as a valuable source of information and ideas. Unfortunately, however, the literature that exists in English is only the tip of the iceberg, particularly on issues that do not fall within conventional institutional frameworks.

Every serious communication researcher today will agree that the miners' radio stations are a paradigm of community and participatory media, but very few have taken them as a subject for research. That is why I have so much respect for those few researchers from North America who have gone into the real primary sources, in Spanish, to write about this subject. Foremost is Alan O'Connor, who has been writing on the topic since the mid-1980s. Now through this his latest contribution, monolingual scholars will benefit from the burden he has taken on himself of reading, selecting, and translating from Spanish a number of materials, mostly from Bolivian authors, that remained until now unpublished in English.

This book appears at a time when the social, political, and communicational landscape of Bolivian miners' radio has greatly changed. Since 1985, the mining industry in my country has suffered the tidal wave of globalization trends. As the privatization process reached Bolivia, and the state-owned mines were closed down or sold to private and multinational corporations, thousands of miners who were left jobless migrated to the cities. As they did so, they left behind radio stations that no longer had a reason to exist, since their main listening public had dispersed.

Though the miners' radio stations may have declined over the past fifteen years, they already had accumulated such an impressive record that they transformed the social participatory process in the whole country. The former miners, now dispersed in other areas of Bolivia, are carrying with them, wherever they go, the values of participation for social change. We can feel this every day as we look at the emerging social movements that continue to struggle for a more inclusive and democratic nation.

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Radio Nacional de Huanuni (4, 6, 7 October 1988)
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Index

access, to media, 5–6, 37–39, 102, 129
Achacachi, 119
action–research, 41
administration, of radio stations, 6, 36, 75, 103–4, 115, 123
  directors, 51–52, 68, 70, 72–73, 97, 98
  Radio Nacional de Huanuni, 97–98
  radio workers and, 103–4
advertising
  consumerism and, 76
  programming and, 100, 110, 111
  revenue from, 22, 37, 72
Air Force, 31, 91
Alas, 107
Alcócer, Pastor, 45, 80
alcoholism, 22, 55
Algeria, ii
AM radio, 11n2
anarchism, 9, 69
anniversary notices, 110
announcers, at miners' radio stations
  as community leaders, 52, 54, 62, 130
  outside contractors as, 24, 27, 69, 98
  persecution of, 59
  voices, 51, 54, 66, 86, 107
  wages, 12, 23–24, 53–54, 110, 116
announcers, at Radio Pío XII, 22, 53, 56, 60
anti-imperialism, 39–40, 58–59
anticommunism
  of MNR, 59n25
  Radio Pío XII and, 22, 24, 25, 52–53, 54–55, 56
APDHB (Bolivian Permanent Assembly for Human Rights), 63n29
Aqui, 3, 7, 83–84
Aramayo family, 48, 55, 122
Arce, Adrián, 75
Arce Gómez, Luis, 30, 84
Arenas, Roberto, 80
Argentina, 21, 47n19, 49, 109
Army, 27, 83–87, 91–96, 119
  see also coups
Arroyo, Eduardo, 71
assemblies
  announcements of, 58
  broadcasts of, 40n15, 74, 95, 109
  García Meza coup and, 93–94, 95
  as media participation, 5, 103
  self-management and, 5
Association of Journalists of Potosí, 108
Atoroma, 79
autonomy, of radio stations, 7, 51–52, 126
Aymara
  community structure, 34
  language, 28, 34, 115, 120

Baldivieso, Victor, 126
Banzer Suárez, Hugo, 27, 28, 30, 57n24, 75, 76
  radio stations and, 60, 61, 66
Baptist Church, 27, 37
Barrientos Ortuño, René, 25, 27, 59–60, 64, 75

arrios de Chungara, Domitila, 26, 28, 29
BC (British Broadcasting Corporation), 101
ereavement notices, 110
olivia, i, 6–7, 33, 52, 110
olivian government
armed forces, 1, 27, 31, 83–87, 91, 91–96, 119
communications regulations, 17, 41n16, 42, 110, 115, 126, 127
Mines, Minister of, 117
monetary stabilization, 57
Radio Pío XII and, 22, 56
see also coups; licenses; National Revolution
olivian Mining Corporation *see* COMIBOL
olivian Permanent Assembly for Human Rights (APDHB), 63n29
olivian Socialist Falange (FSB), 48n22
olivian State Petroleum Wells (YPFB), 55n23
razil, 47n19
os Brillantes, 109
roadcasting
bands, 11n2, 12, 73
from cities, 11, 27, 31, 32, 50, 106
to cities, 114, 116
frequencies of, 73, 98, 114
hours of, 12, 13, 52, 100, 125
interference with, 12, 86
power, 12, 21, 22, 37, 50, 54, 98, 105, 114
range of, 21, 50, 54, 105, 116, 130
transmitters and, 2, 22, 72, 114, 115, 125
see also licenses, broadcasting
uen Retiro, 86, 89, 93, 95
uildings and facilities, of radio stations, 53, 72–73, 98, 125
auditoriums, 28, 37, 73, 76, 100, 108, 109
record libraries, 2, 37, 49, 53, 72, 98
studios, 37, 53, 98, 114
Bustillos, 50

Cajías, Lupe, 8–9
Calamarca, 119
Camacho, Isaac, 69
Camacho, Walter, 71
campesinos, 114
García Meza coup and, 86–87, 89
miners and, 27–28, 81, 89, 120
radio stations of, 16n5, 113, 117–18, 120
Canadians, 12, 55
Caracoles, 85
Cárdenas, "Piantadino," 108
Carpio, Luzmila, 109
Castro, Fidel, 55
Catavi
García Meza coup and, 91, 94
hostage-taking, 73–74
Oruro demonstration and, 8
Radio Sucre and, 20
Radio 21 de Diciembre and, 49
tin processing in, 50
Catholic Church, 7, 13, 22, 25, 78
see also Radio Fides; Radio Pío XII
CBF (Bolivian Development Corporation), 55n23
censorship, 84, 107
Central South Council, 87, 88, 89, 90, 94
CEPROMIN (Center for the Promotion of Miners), 100–101
Chaco War, 6, 47–48, 58, 107
Chacoya, 92
Chaguaya, 113, 118
Chasquihuasi Communications, 128
children, 31, 57, 77–78, 117, 130
programming for, 62, 100, 115
Chile, 3, 29, 49, 128
Chocaya, 86, 93

Chorolque, 86, 89, 93, 95
Christian Aid, 114
Chungara, Domitila *see* Barrios de Chungara, Domitila
Churches
Baptist, 27, 37
Catholic, 7, 13, 22, 25, 78
see also Radio Fides; Radio Pío XII
CIMCA (Center for Integration of Alternative Media), 12, 15, 16
cinema, 12, 76
cities
broadcasting from, 11, 27, 31, 32, 50, 106
broadcasting to, 114, 116
clandestine radio stations, 47, 48
licenses and, 12, 42, 73, 115, 123, 126, 128
class alliances, 2, 28
class consciousness, 33, 74, 76, 123
COB (Trade Union Congress of Bolivia)
community structure and, 34
creation of, 45n18
García Meza coup and, 83, 84, 90
political independence of, 21
radio stations and, 7, 127
social practice and, 35
view of radio, 51
see also congresses and conferences; Decree 21060
Cochabamba, 27, 88
collective memory, 29, 34
Colquiri
congress in, 69, 74
politics of, 10, 91
Radio Colquiri, 64, 72
COMIBOL (Bolivian Mining Corporation)
Radio Pío XII and, 25, 55, 61
restitution and, 78
restructuring *see* Decree 21060
the state and, 55n23
television and, 28
Trotskyists and, 24
union discourse and, 39, 71, 77
workers and, 113
commercial radio, 11, 50, 106, 107, 109, 123
communication
alternative, ii–iv, 1, 8, 35–41, 129
research on, 1, 131
sender–receiver theory, 34, 38–39
typology of, 36
communism
accusations of, 56, 59
COB and, 21n7
Cuban, 55
in mining centers, 53
see also anticommunism
Communist Party, 23, 69
community life, 34, 62
community media, 5, 8, 129–31
competition, between radio stations, 10, 23, 54, 55
Comunicación y Cultura, 3
congresses and conferences
1962, XV, La Paz, 9, 70, 71, 80
1963, Colquiri/Oruro, 74
1966, XIII, Siete Suyos, 75
1976, Corocoro, 29
1986, XXI, Oruro, 117
1988, XXII, 16, 124–26
of COB, 12, 75, 127
cultural, 9, 70–74, 76–81
women's participation in, 29, 117
Consultative Cultural Council, 73
contractors, at radio stations, 23, 24, 27, 69, 98
Control Obrero, 70
Corocoro
congress in, 29
García Meza coup and, 93
radio stations and, 106
countryside, 28, 33, 59
coups
1964, Barrientos–Ovando, 25

1969, Ovando, 60n27
1970, military triumvirate, 60n28
1971, Banzer, 25n11, 27, 60
1978, Pereda, 30
1979, military junta, 77, 84
1980, García Meza, 6, 10, 30–32, 63n29, 77, 83–96
communication theories and, 6, 36
The Courage of the People, 34
Cruz del Sur, 27, 37
Cuba, 55
cultural conferences
First, 70–74
Second, 76–78
Third, 78–81
cultural radio stations, 37, 123
culture
indigenous, 7
oral, 34
popular, 36
secretaries of, 16, 51, 52, 70, 97, 123

Dalence, Guillermo, 114, 116–17, 119
dances, community, 62
Days of March, 81
death notices, 110
Decree 21060
as dispersion of radio audience, 15, 81, 113, 120, 128, 132
protests against, 117, 119
social toll of, 14, 116, 117, 124
democracy
communicational, 1, 4–6, 41–42, 66, 81
Network for Democracy, 30–31, 32
political, 1, 27, 78, 129, 132
demonstrations
broadcasts of, 109, 111
Days of March, 81
March for Life and Peace (1986), 12, 119, 126
in Oruro (1964), 8, 64–65
deportations, 29
development organizations, 129, 130
DGT (Director General of Telecommunications), 17, 115, 126, 127
dialogue, theory of, 6
El Diario, 122
dictatorship, 27, 65
director general of radio communications, 70–71, 73
discipline, in radio stations, 54
discourse, 39–40
disinformation, 29–30, 32, 96
dismissals, 58
doctors, 48, 53
drama, on radio, 76, 77, 109
dynamite, 24, 31, 55

Ecos, 108
Eder Plan, 69
educational programming, 100, 102, 113
El Salvador, ii
elections, 30, 57n24, 92, 121–22
EMEREC, 39
emergencies
mobilization during, 38, 62, 63, 84, 86–96
radio networks and, 11–12, 38, 62, 84–85, 86–96
vs. normal times, 6, 8, 12, 36, 38, 62, 102–3
emergency cultural plan (COB), 76
ENAF (National Smelting Company), 55n23
English language, 86, 131
Enriquez, Alejandro, 95–96
Epinaza valley, 28n12
Escóbar, Federico, 24, 69, 74
Espinal, Luis, 84
exiles, political, 2, 3, 6, 26, 30, 58

Falangists, 48

fascism and neo-fascism, 30, 60n28, 63, 76
Federal Republic of Germany, 24n9, 56, 57
Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia *see* FSTMB
Federation of Radio Broadcasters, 74
Federation of Radio Workers, 73
Felmen Velarde, José, 47
Fernández, Luis Alfonso, 107
finances, of miners' radio stations
debt, 72, 126–27
dues, 12, 36, 51, 72, 99, 116, 122, 125, 127, 130
external funding and, 8
ownership/capital investment, 49, 72–73, 103, 130–31
revenues, 22, 72–73, 110
see also wages
finances, of Radio Pío XII, 22, 55–56
Flores, Carlos, 83
Flores Ponce, Isaac, 107
FM radio, ii, 12, 59, 114–15, 118, 120
folklore, 28, 76
foreign radio stations, 32, 37, 49, 56, 92, 101
Forti, Líber, 8, 67n30, 69, 73, 74
France, ii
FSB (Bolivian Socialist Falange), 48n22
FSTMB (Federated Union of Mine Workers of Bolivia)
archives of, 68
Commission of Culture, 80, 113
Forti and, 67n30
García Meza coup and, 83, 84, 90–91, 95–96
leadership of, 124, 126
national office and locals, 11
radio stations and, 7, 9, 11, 15, 51, 113, 118, 121, 122, 125
Resolution No. 16 (1962), 9, 70, 71, 80
social practice and, 35
see also congresses and conferences; Decree 21060

Galarza, Guzmán, 47n19
García, David, 114
García Maissman, Rosendo, 75
García Meza Tejada, Luis, 2–3, 30, 45, 66
Germany, Federal Republic of, 24n9, 56, 57
Gramsci, Antonio, 2, 11, 15
Gremier, Lino, 56–57
guerrilla movements, ii, 25, 59–60, 75
Guevara, Ernesto "Che," 59, 75
Gumucio Dagron, Alfonso, ii, 11–12, 15, 17, 38, 129n50
Gutiérrez Daza, Armando, 108

Hayrajata, Malaquito, 109
Henderson, Douglas, 59
Hilmes, Michele, i
Hochschild, Mauricio, 48, 55
housewives
Barrios de Chungara, Domitila, 26, 28, 29
defense of stations, 86, 130
hunger strikes by, 27, 30
participation in radio, 6, 95, 115
union congresses and, 29, 117
Huanuni, 88, 97, 116, 117
human rights, 1, 9, 63n29
humor, 11, 13, 24, 107, 108
hunger strikes, 13, 14, 27, 30, 61, 75, 106

ideologies, 6–7, 21, 23, 108
imprisonment, 26, 58
improvisation, 34, 110
Independent Media Centre, 2
India, ii

inovations, 108, 109
ntellectuals, 2, 6–8, 11
nteramerican Development Bank, 24n9, 57
nternational Monetary Fund (IMF), 2, 7, 57, 59
nternational organizations, and radio, 15, 17, 22, 114, 130
nternational Tin Council, 15
rony, 11, 13, 107
taly, ii

esuits, 27
imenez, Cirilo, 114
ournalists' associations, 11, 108, 122

Kentacacharis, Pedrito, 109
Kúncar C., Gridvia, 5–6

La Paz
  broadcasting and, 13, 27, 50, 114
  demonstrations in, 81, 119
  FSTMB conference, 9, 70, 71, 80
  García Meza coup and, 83–84, 85, 88, 89, 90–91, 92, 95–96
  student movement in, 25
abor, donated, 99, 122
anguages
  Aymara, 28, 34, 115, 120
  English, 86, 131
  Quechua, 24, 28, 34, 106, 109, 111
  Spanish, 86, 131
Latin America, iii, 131
Lechín Oquendo, Juan, 21n7, 64, 69, 74, 91
Lefebvre, Maurice, 22, 25, 57
Left MNR (MNRI), 57n24
Leftist Revolutionary Party (PIR), 47n20
Leyton, Robert, 107
licenses, broadcasting
  clandestine status and, 12, 42, 73, 115, 123, 126, 128
  for cultural stations, 123
  fees, 17, 126, 128
Limachi, Luisa, 11, 68
literacy
  education for, 59, 72, 109
  levels of, 34, 58
Llallagua
  coups and, 28, 93
  Oruro demonstration and, 8
  Radio Pío XII and, 22, 56–57
  Radio Sucre and, 20, 49
  urban issues, 14
Loa Regiment, 86
Loneville, Diego, 25
López, Fátima, 68
López, Victor, 9, 69, 80
Lora, César, 69
Lora, Guillermo, 8
Lozada, Fernando, 5–6, 10–11

Making Waves, ii, 130
Mamani, Juan, 65
Mancilla Romero, Jorge, 6–8, 45n17, 46, 64–65
Mansila Torres, Jorge "Coco Manto," 24n10
March for Life and Peace, 12, 119, 126
Marxists, 47n20
massacres
  21 December (1942), 49
  documentary film and, 34
  May System (1965) and, 58
  red, 58, 81
  San Juan (1967), 26, 59
  Tolata and Epinaza valley, 28n12
  white, 58, 119, 126
Matilde mine, 113, 116–17, 119–20
May System, 58, 64
media
  alternative, ii–iv, 1, 8, 35–41, 129
  community, 5, 8, 129–31
  corporate, iii, iv, 1
  radio's status among, i–ii, 32–35

  see also access; participation; self-management
medicine, traditional, 115
Mexico, 3, 6, 52, 109
microphones
  defense of, 63
  participation in media and, 6, 32, 37–38, 95
  quality of, 49, 125
Military–Campesino Pact, 27
Milluni, 106
miners
  campesinos and, 27–28, 81, 89, 113, 120
  economic significance of, 33, 124
  García Meza coup and, 45, 83, 84, 90–91, 95–96
  guerrilla movement and, 59–60, 75
  relocation of *see* Decree 21060
  strikes by, 29, 61, 75, 78, 81, 106, 111
  see also FSTMB
Miners' Federation on the Air, 114
mines
  nationalized, 45n18, 97
  see also Decree 21060; Matilde; Siglo XX
mining cooperatives, 14
mining equipment, 119
mining industry, 57, 132
Mining Radio Network, 31
Miraflores, 96
mita (donated labor), 99, 122
MNR (Nationalist Revolutionary Movement)
  1952 revolution and, 7, 45n18
  anticommunism of, 59n25
  Barrientos and, 25, 59n25
  campesinos and, 27
  creation of, 47
  miners and, 7, 8, 23, 58–59, 69, 74, 106
  MNRI (Left MNR), 57n24
  radio stations and, 21, 70, 106, 123
mobilization
  in emergencies, 38, 63, 84, 86–96
  through radio networks, 12, 31, 38, 62, 84
Monroy, "Mosca," 63n29
Montenegro, Carlos, 47
Morales, Armondo, 122
Murillo, Alberto, 125, 128
music
  campesinos' radio and, 118
  early miners' stations and, 21
  genres of, 52, 102
  incidental, 13, 92, 107, 111
  live, 108
  Radio Pío XII and, 54
  requests, 52, 109
  sources of, 102
  on weekends, 100

National Miners' Conference, XV (Resolution No. 16), 9, 70, 71, 80
National Revolution, 6–7, 45n18, 57
  and miners' radio, 20, 45–46, 122
National Smelting Company (ENAF), 55n23
nationalism, 45n18, 60n27, 60n28
Nationalist Revolutionary Movement *see* MNR
nationalization, 45n18, 60n27
Natusch Busch, Alberto, 30
Network of Informative Services, 106
news agencies, 3, 37
news programming
  at church stations, 27, 37, 54
  García Meza coup and, 30–32, 83–86
  at miners' stations, 11, 13–14, 100, 101, 107–108
news services, 98, 101
newspapers
  literacy and, i, 34, 58
  power/politics and, 3, 58, 84, 107

source for radio, 37, 107
Nicaragua, 40
non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 129, 130
Nor Lípez, 89
North America, i, 17, 131
NUESTROSMedios, ii–iii
NWICO (New World Information and Communication Order), 1, 2–6
see also access; participation; self-management

Oblates of Mary Immaculate, 22, 24, 25–26, 52–53, 56–57
occupations, military and paramilitary
of FSTMB national office, 91
of mines, 58
of radio stations, 10, 27, 29, 30
O'Connor, Alan, iii, 131
oral culture, 34
Oruro, 27, 116
demonstration in, 8, 64–65
García Meza coup and, 88
radio stations, 108, 122
OURMedia, ii–iii
Ovando Candia, Alfredo, 27, 60
Oxfam, 17

Paraguay, 47n19, 64
Pareja, René, 123
participation, in media
listeners' social reality and, 11, 102
microphones and, 6, 32, 37–38, 95
as model of democracy, 132
normal times vs. emergencies, 6, 8, 12, 36, 38, 62, 102–3
radio workers and, 103–4
theory of and research on, 5–6, 10–11, 38–39, 129–30, 131
unions and, 5, 76, 103–4
Pasquali, Antonio, 6, 39
Patiño, Simón, 20, 48, 55, 122
Paz Estenssoro, Victor
1956–64 governments, 8, 24n9, 60n26, 74
1985–89 government, 116, 124
Pereda Asbún, Juan, 30
Pérez, Justo, 114
personnel
number of, 72, 99
outside contractors as, 23, 24, 27, 69, 98
training of, 65, 107–8
wages of, 12, 13, 23–24, 53–54, 110, 116
Peru, 116
petroleum companies, 47, 55n23
Pimentel, Irineo, 69, 74
Pimentel, José, 114
Pinochet, Augusto, 3, 29
PIR (Leftist Revolutionary Party), 47n20
political parties, radio and, 58
Pomarayme, Jaime, 98
Popular and Democratic Union *see* UDP
POR (Revolutionary Workers' Party), 23, 69
Potosí, 11, 27, 106
journalists' association, 11, 108
miners' radio seminar in, 15, 128
Radio Electra, 109
Radio Potosí, 107, 108
Prensa Minero, 13
Press Law (1925), 41n16
press workers, union of, 128
priests, 22, 25, 119
Primero de Mayo, 8
PRIN (Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left), 21n7, 69
programming, at campesinos' radio stations, 118
programming, at miners' radio stations, 6, 52, 78, 107, 108
children's, 62, 100, 115

cultural, 67, 72
at earliest radio stations, 10, 21
educational, 72, 100, 102, 113
live, 108–9
musical *see under* music
opinion, 107–8
quality of, 6, 71
time reports, 21, 52
union notices, 21, 115
at La Voz del Minero, 26–27
women's, 11n1, 54
programming, at Radio Pío XII, 23, 53, 54–55
PSC (Social Christian Party), 23
public health, 22, 57
Pulacayo, 75, 121
pulperías, 33n14, 39, 116, 122

Quechisla, 86, 106, 111
Quechua
community structure, 34
language, 24, 28, 34, 106, 109, 111
Quiroga Santa Cruz, Marcelo, 83
Quispe, Sebastian, 115, 117–18

RADEPA (Rational Lodge for the Fatherland), 47n20
Radio Animas, 31, 72, 125, 126
García Meza coup and, 85–88, 89–90, 92–95
Radio Bolívar, 47–48
Radio Bolivia, 47
Radio Chichas, 89
Radio Chorolque, 72
Radio Colquiri, 64, 72
Radio Electra, 109
radio equipment
competition over, 2, 49
condition of, 2, 125
consoles, 37
hand-built, 2, 105
installation of, 49
record players, 75
restitution of, 37, 78–79
seizure or destruction of, 12, 29, 37, 59, 60, 63
sources of, 49, 72, 114
telex, lack of, 37, 98
transmitters, 2, 22, 72, 114, 115, 125
see also broadcasting; microphones
Radio Exelsior, 75
Radio Fides, 13, 14, 27, 37
destruction of, 63, 83, 84, 91
Radio Huayna Potosí, 72
Radio Illimani, 21, 31, 84–85
Radio Liberación, 106
Radio Machacamarca, 8
Radio Matilde, 11, 79, 81, 113–20
Radio Milluni, 72, 79, 126
Radio Nacional de Huanuni
administration, 97–98, 108
creation of, 49
finances, 10, 72, 99, 125
García Meza coup and, 10, 85, 86, 87, 88, 90–91, 93
MNR and, 70
networks and, 10, 111, 125, 126, 128
occupation of, 10, 31
Oruro demonstration and, 8
personnel, 72, 99
programming, 10, 98, 100, 101
range, 105
radio networks
emergencies and, 11–12, 38, 62, 84–85, 86–96, 93
FSTMB and, 16–17, 113–14
mobilization through, 12, 31, 38, 62, 84
Network for Democracy, 30–31, 32
Network of Miners' Radio Stations, 70, 71, 73
Networks of Union and Popular Radio Stations, 81

Radio Illimani and, 31, 84–85
Radio Nacional de Huanuni and, 10, 111, 125, 126, 128
significance, 130
Radio 9 de Abril, 72
Radio Panamericana, 115
Radio Pío XII
announcers at, 22, 53, 56, 60
anticommunism and, 22, 24, 25, 52–53, 54–55, 56
COMIBOL and, 25, 55, 61
conversion of, 7, 24–26, 56–57
creation of, 22, 52
García Meza coup and, 31, 85, 90, 93–94, 95–96
miners' radio stations and, 7, 10, 12, 23, 26, 62, 69, 79n38
Oblate Order and, 22, 24, 25–26, 52–53, 56–57
programming at, 23, 53, 54–55, 56
radio drama and, 109
range, 54, 105
repression of, 26, 28, 60, 61
sabotage of, 24, 55
La Voz del Minero and, 23, 26, 69
Radio Potosí, 107, 108
Radio Reader, i
Radio Rebelión, 123
Radio San Gabriel, 63n29, 84
Radio San José, 8, 111, 114, 122, 123–124, 125
radio stations
audiences, size of, 22
commercial, 11, 50, 106, 107, 109, 123
competition between, 10, 23, 54, 55
creation of, 73
cultural, 37, 123
foreign, 21, 32, 37, 49, 56, 92, 101
listed, 43, 49–50, 68, 72–73, 79, 82
local nature of, 10, 11, 13, 15
national influence of, 13, 130
numbers of, 20, 22, 49, 121, 125
political aims, 21, 111, 123
stages of development, 20, 22, 26
see also administration; buildings and facilities; clandestine radio stations; finances; licenses; radio equipment; radio networks; repression, of radio stations
Radio Sucre, 20, 48, 49
Radio Sumac Orcko, 11, 73, 105–11
Radio Vanguardia
García Meza coup and, 31, 91, 93
Mancilla and, 64–65
Radio 21 de Diciembre, 20, 49, 72
García Meza coup and, 31, 88, 93
Radio Venceremos, ii
Radio Viloco, 72, 79, 93
radio workers
administration and, 103–4
exile of, 26
secretary of, 71
unions of, 16, 25, 56, 127
wages of, 12, 23–24, 53–54, 110, 116
Ramírez, Edgar, 114, 116–17, 120
La Razón, 122
Reader's Digest, 54
Reagan, Ronald, 15
receivers, social, 34, 38–39
reciprocity, 27
record libraries, 2, 37, 49, 53, 72, 98, 114
Red Cross, 25n11
repression, of miners, 33, 105
repression, of radio stations, 1, 8–9, 10, 20, 27, 56, 122, 124
Banzer and, 28, 29, 60–61, 63, 66, 75
Barrientos and, 58, 59, 65, 74, 75
defense against, 28, 31–32, 38, 63, 86–87, 89–90, 91–96
García Meza and, 2–3, 30–32, 63, 66, 83
occupations, 10, 27, 29, 30
Patiño and, 20, 122
restitution following, 6, 29, 30, 37, 40, 65–66, 75, 78–79, 80
Resolution No. 16 (1962), 9, 70, 71, 80
restitution, of radio stations, 6, 29, 30, 37, 40, 65–66, 75, 78–79, 80
Retamoso, Dulfredo, 11
revolutionary nationalism, 6–7, 21
Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left (PRIN), 21n7, 69
Revolutionary Workers' Party (POR), 23, 69
Reyes, Simón, 91
Reyes Matta, Fernando, 36
Rosario, 86, 89, 93

sabotage, 24, 55
Salamanca, Daniel, 47n19
Salazar, Santiago, 114
Salinas, Raquel, 15
San Juan, Massacre of, 26, 59
San Vicente, 86, 89, 93
Sánchez, Hugo, 73
sanitation, 98
Sanjinés, Jorge, 26, 34
Santa Ana, 86, 87, 92, 94
Santa Cruz, 127
scripts, 111
scriptwriters, 22
secretaries of culture, 16, 51, 52, 70, 97, 123
Secretary of Radio Workers, 71
sectarianism, 9, 10, 71, 74, 81, 127
self-management, in media, 5, 10–11, 36
senders, social, 34, 38–39
Service for Press and Culture (SPIC), 21
shortwave, 11n2, 98, 114, 115, 123
SIDERSA (iron smelting company), 55n23
Siete Suyos, 75, 78
García Meza coup and, 86, 87, 89, 94, 95
Siglo XX
García Meza coup and, 88, 91, 94
Oruro demonstration and, 8, 65
politics of, 10
Radio Sucre and, 20, 48–49
repression and, 75
La Voz del Minero and, 122
Siles Salinas, Luis Adolfo, 60
Siles Zuazo, Hernán, 57, 69
silicosis, 22, 57
smuggling, 14
Social Christian Party (PSC), 23
social doctrine, 25
social practice, 35–36, 62
Solares (doctor), 49
soldiers, 86, 87, 92
solidarity, 9, 15, 74, 76, 77, 80, 114, 128
Sosa, Panchito, 109
Spanish language, 86, 131
sports, 100
state, oligarchic, 55n23
strikes
general, 81, 84, 90
miners', 29, 61, 75, 78, 81, 106, 111
teachers', 14
structure
communicational, 42
community, 34, 62
students, 6, 14, 25, 37
studios, 37, 53, 98, 114
Subieta, José "Motete," 107
Sud Lípez, 87
Supreme Decree 21060 *see* Decree 21060

Tacna, 86, 89, 93, 95
teachers, 14, 48
radio and, 7, 20, 37, 49, 51, 59, 97, 98, 115
Telecommunications Law, 41n16